

OPINION 6
TIME TO RECONCILE
KASHMIRI PANDITS

WORLD 9
4 KILLED, MANY HURT IN
ALABAMA SHOOTING

MONEY 10
INDIAN ECONOMY LIKELY TO
GROW AT 6.5% IN FY24: SANYAL

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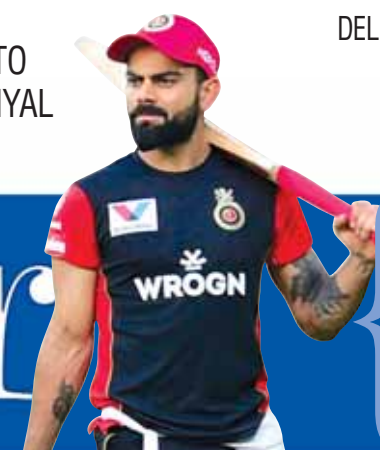
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CBI grills Kejriwal for nine hrs in excise policy case

Was asked 56 questions, says Delhi CM after leaving agency HQ

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

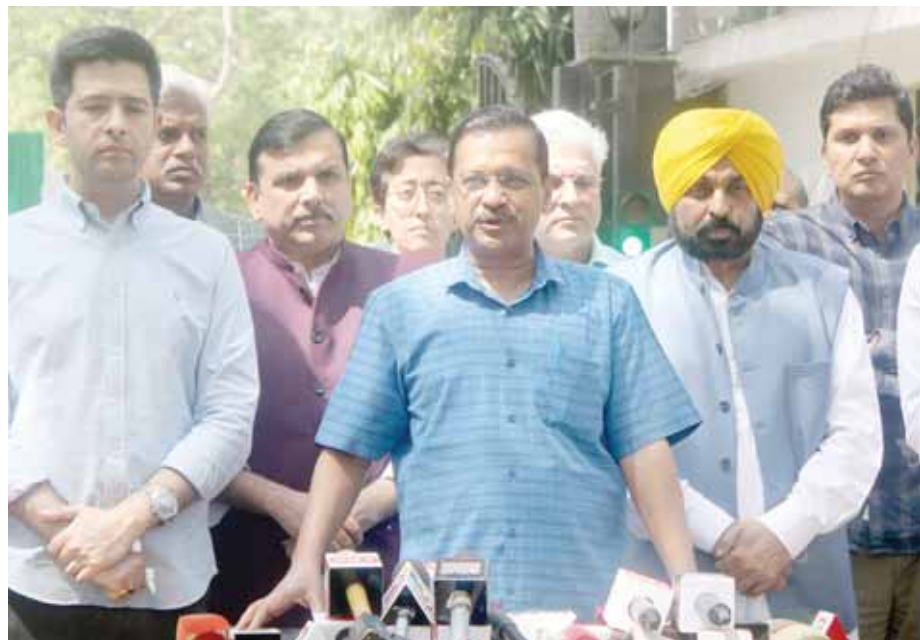
The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Sunday grilled Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for nearly nine hours in the excise policy case.

As Kejriwal's quizzing was underway, his party held protests outside the agency's office even as the AAP chief accused the CBI of acting at the behest of the BJP.

After his grilling, Kejriwal said the CBI asked him around 56 questions regarding the excise policy case and he answered them all.

"I want to say that the entire excise policy case is false. They do not have any evidence that the AAP is wrong. It's a result of dirty politics," he told reporters.

He was speaking to the media at his residence late at night after being released by the



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal along with Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann, party's Rajya Sabha MPs Sanjay Singh and Raghav Chadha leaves his residence to appear before the CBI for questioning in the now-scrapped liquor policy case, in New Delhi on Sunday

probe agency.

Thanking the CBI officials for their "hospitality," the Delhi CM said, "They asked me questions in a friendly and harmonious manner. I answered

all the questions asked by them. The CBI asked around 56 questions regarding the excise policy, including when and why the policy was started."

In a statement released

after Kejriwal's questioning, the CBI said it recorded his statement in the case.

The CBI had registered a case against the then Deputy Chief Minister and Minister-In-charge of Excise, GNCT of Delhi and 14 others for investigation into the allegations of irregularities in framing and implementation of Excise Policy for the year 2021-22 and extending post tender benefits to private persons, it said.

Continued on Page 2

3-member judicial panel set up to probe don's killing

Atiq, Ashraf buried; three assailants sent to 14-days' judicial custody

PNS/PTI ■ LUCKNOW / PRAYAGRAJ

On a day gangster-politician Atiq Ahmad and his brother Khalid Azeem alias Ashraf were buried in the Kasari Masari graveyard in their native village in Uttar Pradesh (UP), the State Government constituted a three-member judicial commission to probe their killing on Saturday by four men posing as journalists. The commission will be headed by High Court Judge (retired) Arvind Kumar Tripathi, retired Judge Brijesh Kumar Soni and former DGP Subesh Kumar Singh. The commission will have to submit its report to the Government within two months, officials said on Sunday, adding the Home Department has constituted the panel under Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952.

Earlier, on Sunday a Prayagraj court sent Atiq Ahmad's three assailants Luvlesh Tiwari (22) of Banda, Mohit, alias Sunny, (23) of Hamirpur and Arun Kumar Maurya (18) of Kasganj to 14 days' judicial custody. The three were caught on the spot after shooting Atiq and his brother outside a hospital in the Shahganj area. The last rites of



A market wears a deserted look after the imposition of Section 144 following the killing of mafioso-turned-politician Atiq Ahmad and his brother Khalid Azim aka Ashraf, in Prayagraj on Sunday (Above); Combo photo of three men; (L-R) Arun Maurya, Sunny Purane and Lavlesh Tiwari, who opened fire at the duo while they were being taken for a medical checkup in Prayagraj (Right)



Ahmad's son Asad, who was gunned down in a police encounter in Jhansi on April 13, were performed here just hours before Saturday's shooting.

"Three accused in Atiq-Ashraf killing sent to 14 days' judicial custody by a court here," lawyer Manish Khanna, who represented Ahmad, said.

Meanwhile, police patrolling was intensified on Sunday in Prayagraj's Chakiya area where Ahmad's house is located even as the UP police tightened security across the State. Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) have been issued in all districts

of UP to prevent any untoward incident. Internet services remained shut in Prayagraj district as part of the security measures. Interestingly, just two weeks before his killing, the Supreme Court had dismissed Ahmad's plea seeking protection during his custody with the UP Police. Continued on Page 2

AAP leaders detained, party calls emergency meet of office-bearers

1,350 people detained for staging protest against CBI were released at night

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP on Sunday held an "emergency meeting" of its office-bearers to decide the party's next course of action

after several top leaders were "detained" while protesting against the CBI summoning Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the excise policy case. "The Delhi Police has arrested us for sitting peacefully and is taking us to some unknown place... What kind of dictatorship is this?" Chadha tweeted in Hindi.

The AAP's Delhi unit convenor Gopal Rai chaired the meeting, which included Mayor Shelly Oberoi, Deputy Mayor Aaley Mohammad Iqbal, the party's national sec-

retary Pankaj Gupta and leader Jasmine Shah.

As many as 1,350 people, including several senior AAP leaders were detained by the Delhi Police while they were staging a sit-in protest against Kejriwal's summoning in connection with the excise policy case. The detainees included Rajya Sabha MPs Sanjay Singh and Raghav Chadha, Delhi Ministers Saurabh Bharadwaj, Atishi and Kailash Gahlot, AAP spokesperson Adil Ahmad Khan, its general secretary Pankaj Gupta and some Ministers in the Punjab Government.

However, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, who also joined the sit-in on Archbishop Road, had left the spot before the other AAP leaders' detention.

The detainees were released by the police later in the night. While being released from the police station, the AAP leaders raised slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The CBI summoned Kejriwal to its office to answer questions of the investigation team as a witness in the excise policy case, according to a notice issued by the agency.

Court issues summons to Kejriwal, Sanjay in Guj Univ defamation case

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

A court in Ahmedabad has issued summons to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh in a criminal defamation complaint for their alleged sarcastic and derogatory statements against Gujarat University.

The court of Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Jayeshbhai Chovatiya on Saturday summoned the two AAP leaders on May 23, after observing that prima facie there appeared to be a case against them under Indian Penal Code Section 500 (defamation) on a complaint filed by the Gujarat University's registrar Piyush Patel.

The court also ordered to delete 'Chief Minister' from Kejriwal's name in the cause title of the case, saying the statements were made by him in his personal capacity.

Kejriwal and Singh had made the comments after the Gujarat High Court passed an

order setting aside the Chief Information Commissioner's order asking the Gujarat University (GU) to provide information on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's academic degree.

As per the complainant, they made "defamatory" statements in press conferences and on Twitter handles targeting the university. Their comments hurt the prestige of the institution which has established its name among the public, he said.

The Gujarat University was established more than 70 years ago. It is reputed among the people and utterances by the accused will create mistrust about the university, the complainant's lawyer Amit Nair argued. The complainant alleged the statements were defamatory towards the university because they were sarcastic and intended to intentionally hurt the prestige of the university. They were shared in the media and on Twitter handles with the same intention, he said.

Opp parties demand SC-monitored probe

PNS/PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition parties on Sunday came down heavily on the Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh (UP) Government over the killing of gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf Ahmad, seeking a Supreme Court-monitored investigation and the resignation of the UP Chief Minister over the issue. While maintaining that criminals should be given the harshest of punishment, the Congress said it should be done under the rule of law and subverting or violating the rule of law was dangerous for democracy.

"Whoever does this, or gives protection to those who do such acts, should also be held responsible and the law should be strictly enforced on them. It should be our collective endeavour to ensure that the judicial system and rule of law are at all times honoured in letter and spirit," Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said.

Without taking names, in a tweet in Hindi, Priyanka Vadra said the law of the country was written in the Constitution and

this law was paramount. "Whoever plays with or violates the rule of law and the judicial process or gives protection to those who indulge in such an act, should also be held responsible and the law should be strictly enforced on that person," she said, adding that it should be the endeavour of all that the justice system and the rule of law remained supreme in India.

AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi alleged that the UP Government had a role in the killings and demanded a Supreme Court-monitored investigation into the matter.

"No officer from Uttar Pradesh should be included in the committee. This was a cold-blooded murder," he said adding people who were celebrating this killing are "vultures".

Owaisi said that the incident raises a big question about the law and order situation in the State and demanded the resignation of Yogi Adityanath. "I have always been saying that BJP in Uttar Pradesh is not running the Government by the rule of law but by the rule of gun," Owaisi said.

Continued on Page 2

MHA to prepare SOPs for safety of journalists

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs has decided to prepare Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the safety of journalists in the wake of three assailants, posing as mediapersons, killing gangster Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf, in the middle of a media interaction, while police personnel were escorting them to a medical college for a checkup, sources said.

The MHA, under the leadership of the Prime Minister and guidance of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, will prepare the SOPs for the safety and security of journalists, official sources said.

The step is being taken after the three attackers struck in Prayagraj on Saturday night while Ahmad and his brother were speaking to reporters.

Raising questions about the vetting procedures of the UP Police of mediapersons present there, the three assailants who posed as journalists were even carrying video cameras, mikes and media identity cards.

CAPSULE

EIGHTY HELD FOR ILLICIT LIQUOR TRADE IN BIHAR

Motihari/Patna: Police have arrested 80 people from East Champaran district of dry Bihar for allegedly being involved in spurious liquor trade, following a suspected hooch tragedy that claimed 14 lives so far in Motihari, officials said on Sunday. 11 police personnel posted as in-charge of ALTF have been suspended.

FOUR INDIANS DEAD IN BUILDING FIRE IN DUBAI

Dubai: Four Indians, including a couple from Kerala, were among 16 people dead after a massive fire broke out in a residential building in Dubai that also injured nine others, officials said on Sunday.

INDIA LOGS OVER 10K NEW CORONA INFECTIONS

New Delhi: India added 10,093 new coronavirus infections, while the active cases increased to 57,542, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

Indian dies of bullet injuries in Sudan violence

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The armed clashes between the army and para-military in Sudan have claimed the life of an Indian working there. He was hit by a stray bullet and the Indian Embassy there was in touch with his family and the medical authorities to make further arrangements.

So far, 56 people including the Indian have died and more than 600 injured in violence.

"It has been reported that Albert Augustine, an Indian national working in a Dal Group Company in Sudan who got hit by a stray bullet yesterday succumbed to his injuries," a tweet from the Indian Embassy in Sudan on Sunday read.

The Embassy said they are in touch with Augustine's family and medical authorities to make further arrangements.

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Tungnath temple may get nat'l importance tag

ASI issues draft notice seeking views on Shiva temple built at over 12000 feet

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

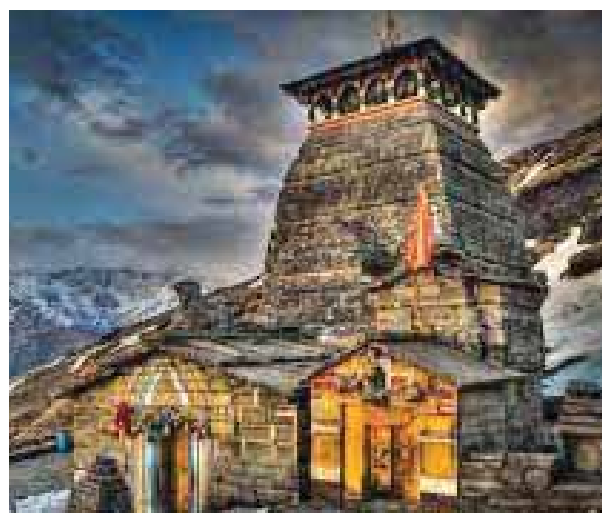
Nestled in the picturesque snow-clad mountains at an altitude of over 12000 feet, historical Tungnath temple in Uttarakhand's Rudrapur district may soon get the tag of "national importance" with the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) issuing a draft notification inviting suggestions and objections to its plans to bring it under its ambit.

One of the most holy sites for Hindu pilgrims, the doors of the third Kedar Lord Tungnath will open for devotees on April 26. It is said to be

the highest Shiva temple among the five "Panch Kedar" temples and is believed to have belonged to an ancient era and is almost 1000-years-old.

The ASI under the Union Culture Ministry had issued the draft notification last month.

"Any objection or suggestions, to the declaration of the said ancient monument to be of national importance, may be made within a period of two months from the date of issue of this notification, by any interested person in the said ancient monument, to the Director General, Archaeological Survey of India..." "The objections or suggestions, if any, received from any person with respect to the said draft notification within the period so specified shall be taken into consideration by the Central Government," says the notification signed by the ASI Director-General V Vidyavathi. The ASI's move followed after the Dehradun circle of the ASI



sought approval from the Centre to declare it as a national monument and start work on its conservation. It is also referred to as "Tritiya Kedar", since it is part of the "Panch Kedar" cluster of Shiva temples spread across the Garhwal Himalayas.

The foundation of this temple was laid down by Arjuna who was the third of the Pandava brothers.

It was built in the North Indian style of architecture and has a dozen shrines of other Gods surrounding the temple. Continued on Page 2

J&K completes land demarcation of Reasi lithium reserves sites

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The Union Territory administration in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has completed the demarcation work of the lithium reserves site spread in an area of around three square kilometre in the Salal-Haimna area of Reasi district.

On the other hand the revenue department has also completed the task of creating lists of habitations, plantations and other assets falling within these demarcated limits.

According to official sources, a total number of 326 houses have been identified besides other installations in the region. During the survey the revenue authorities have also demarcated 3,929 kanals of private land, 16,715 kanals of forest land and 269 kanals of UT's land in the region.

Amit Sharma, Secretary to Government, Mining Department, J&K, on Saturday visited the lithium reserves site in Reasi to take first hand account of the area and hold a review of the progress made on this behalf by the district administration.

He said a process has been initiated towards appointing a transaction advisor and auction platform to carry forward extraction process for this potentially rich reserves of lithium to the tune of 5.9 million tonnes, second highest in the world.

He said the UT administration led by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Secretary are looking forward to taking the next steps for Lithium extraction in Reasi at the earliest.

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'BJP has instructed CBI to arrest me'

BJP has ego, power and they threaten everyone: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of his appearance before the CBI, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday alleged that the BJP might have ordered the probe agency to arrest him, and said they are "very powerful and can send anyone to jail".

Kejriwal was questioned by the CBI on Sunday for nearly nine hours in connection with the excise policy scam case, officials said. The AAP chief, who arrived at the heavily fortified agency headquarters at around 11 am in his official black SUV, was taken to the first-floor office of the Anti Corruption Branch where he was quizzed by the investigation team, they said.



Earlier in the day, in a five-minute video message on Twitter, Kejriwal said he would truthfully and honestly answer questions posed by the CBI in the excise case as he has nothing to hide.

"I have been summoned by CBI today and I will give all the answers with honesty. These people are very powerful. They can send anyone to jail, it does not matter if that person has committed any crime or not,"

the AAP leader said. "Since yesterday, all of their leaders are screaming at top of their voices that Kejriwal will be arrested and I think BJP has instructed CBI also that Kejriwal should be arrested. If BJP has given an order, then who is CBI? CBI is going to arrest me," he said.

In the video, the AAP leader charged that the BJP has the "ego" of power and they threaten everybody.

"They keep threatening everyone to obey us or else they will send them to jail. These people are threatening to send Kejriwal to jail, but what will happen with this," he asked. Talking about his journey, the Delhi chief minister said: "You are saying that Kejriwal is corrupt. Earlier I used to work in income tax, I could have earned as much money as I wanted. I quit my job and worked in the slums of Delhi for many years."

The AAP leader said if he is corrupt then no man in the world is honest. "Kejriwal lives for the country and will die for the country, if you call me 100 times for the CBI and ED, I will go 100 times," he said and added, "I love the country and Bharat Mata, can sacrifice my life for the country."

Kejriwal is being summoned as a witness and is not an accused in the excise policy case in which his former deputy Manish Sisodia was arrested by the Central Bureau

of Investigation (CBI) on February 26. Sisodia was last month arrested by the ED.

It is alleged that the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22 to grant licences to liquor traders favoured certain dealers who had allegedly paid bribes for it, a charge strongly refuted by the AAP. The policy was later scrapped.

Officials said the CBI may also quiz Kejriwal on the statements of other accused where they have indicated the manner in which policy was allegedly influenced to favour some liquor businessmen and the 'South liquor lobby'.

In addition, the agency may also seek his role in the formulation of the excise policy and his knowledge about alleged influence being cast by the traders and 'South lobby' members, the officials said.

Kejriwal may also be asked if he was involved in the formulation of the policy before it was given approval, they said.

Heavy traffic snarls in parts of city

As AAP protests against CBI summons to Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Heavy traffic snarls were witnessed on Sunday in several parts of Delhi following protests by AAP workers against the summoning of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the CBI in the excise policy case.

Vehicular movement was choked at the protest sites of Anand Vihar Terminal, ITO Chowk, Mukarba Chowk Peera Garhi Chowk, Lado Sarai Chowk, Crown Plaza Chowk, Dwarka More Sec 6 and Sec 2 Chauraha, Pacific Wala Chowk Subhash Nagar More, Prem Wari Chauraha Ring Road, New Delhi Railway Station Ajmeri Gate Side, Bara Hanuman Mandir, Karol Bagh Chowk, IIT Crossing, ISBT Kashmiri Gate, Raj Ghat and NH 24 near Murga Mandi Gazipur. Serpentine queues of vehicles clogged the roads owing to the protest.



Commuters stuck because of the protests at NH-44 and GT-Karnal Road tweeted pictures that showed long queues of vehicles. Moving at a snail's pace in bumper-to-bumper traffic, many commuters tagged the police in their social media posts and requested them to manage the situation. Police officials, along with the traffic unit deployed at multiple locations, persuaded the protesters to move from the roads and allow vehicular movement to flow.

"We have deployed suffi-

cient force at these locations. But the protesters are on a sit-in, so we are persuading them to move because they are causing heavy traffic jams. If they are refusing to cooperate, we are removing them from the spot," a senior police official said.

The Delhi Police stepped up security outside the CBI headquarters as Kejriwal appeared before the agency for questioning in connection with alleged irregularities in the now-scrapped excise policy, officials said.

CM, his associates shouldn't be shown any support: Maken

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former Delhi Congress chief Ajay Maken on Sunday launched a scathing attack on AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal, saying individuals like him and his associates who face "serious corruption charges" should not be shown any sympathy or support.

The stance by Maken, a former Union minister during the UPA government, is at variance with his party's central leadership as Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had telephoned Kejriwal on Saturday, a day after the AAP convener was summoned by the CBI, and expressed solidarity with the AAP leader.

The statement comes at a time when efforts are being made to unite opposition parties and bring them together on a common platform.

In his call to Kejriwal, Kharge had stressed the need for opposition parties to unite against the BJP ahead of the 2024 general elections, according to sources.

In a long Twitter post that



came on the day of Kejriwal's questioning by the CBI, Maken said, "I believe that individuals like Kejriwal and his associates who face serious corruption charges should not be shown any sympathy or support."

"The allegations of LiquorGate and GheeGate must be thoroughly investigated and those found guilty should be punished."

"It is important for all political leaders, including those from Congress, to recognise that the money gained through corrupt means by Kejriwal has been used against the Congress party in several states, including Punjab, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhanda, and Delhi," Maken said.

250 new vehicles to add to cop's mobility

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lt Governor VK Saxena on Sunday flagged off 250 Delhi Police vehicles that will add to the force's mobility amid ever-increasing operational requirements, officials said.

The newly procured vehicles, including 100 Maruti Suzuki Ertigas and 150 Mahindra Boleros, were flagged off from Baansera, a lush green asset created on the banks of the Yamuna near Sarai Kale Khan, they said. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs approved the procurement of 850 light motor vehicles as

"fresh authorisation" for the Delhi Police to supplement its existing fleet, the officials said.

According to the police, the fleet added on Sunday is the first tranche of the 850 vehicles that comprise 300 Ertigas, 200 Boleros, 100 Mahindra Scorpios and 250 Toyota Innovas. The remaining vehicles will be added gradually.

These vehicles, to be deployed strategically across the national capital, will ensure swifter mobility of the police besides improving the Delhi Police's visibility and enhancing the efficiency, the police said.

LG flags 'procedural lapses' in calling of 1-day Assembly's Session by CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena has raised red flags over "procedural lapses" in summoning of the State Assembly's one-day session on Monday amid AAP convener and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's questioning by the CBI in the alleged liquor scam case.

In a note to the Delhi government, Saxena has pointed out that the Speaker of the Delhi Legislative Assembly has proposed to call the second part of the 4th session of the 7th Assembly, whereas the Delhi Cabinet has recommended for convening a one-day session of the Assembly, officials at LG office said on Sunday.

As per Rules and Act, the Assembly House, which was adjourned sine die on March 29, 2023, has to be first prorogued before a fresh session can be convened. As a session remains unprorogued, a new session cannot be convened, they said.



"I fail to understand as to under what circumstances and under which provision of the GNCTD Act, 1991 the Second Part of the Fourth Session (Budget Session) of the Seventh Legislative Assembly has been convened instead of moving a proposal for Prorogation of the Budget Session and convening of the "One Day Session as per the Cabinet Decision," the LG said in his note.

This convening of Second Part of the Fourth Session (Budget Session) of the Seventh Legislative Assembly is not in accordance with the Cabinet

Decision dated and hence inconsistent with the statutory provisions envisaged under section 6 of the Government of NCT of Delhi Act, 1991, he said. "Therefore, the proposed Second Part of Fourth session on April 17 being summoned without following the due procedure, should not be convened," Saxena suggested.

The LG, in his note, "advised" the government to direct the concerned department to submit an appropriate proposal to prorogue the Fourth Session (Budget Session) of the Seventh

Legislative Assembly with immediate effect, and for summoning "One-Day Session" in accordance with provisions of Section 6 of the GNCTD Act, 1991.

The LG also highlighted that there was no indication of any proposed legislative business to be transacted by the Assembly on April 17.

"This also needs to be reflected in the Cabinet Decision as per Rule 15 (1) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of Legislative Assembly of NCT of Delhi Rules, 1997 to allow the members of the House to come prepared for fruitful deliberations," read his note.

Reacting to the LG's note, senior AAP leader and Cabinet minister in the Kejriwal government Saurabh Bhardwaj said, "Let me enlighten LG — Under Rule 17 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Delhi Assembly, Hon'ble Speaker has the power to call a sitting of the House "at any time after the House has been adjourned sine-die."

BJP stages dharna at Rajghat over AAP's 'insult' to Gandhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A group of Delhi BJP leaders and workers on Sunday staged a sit-in at Rajghat here over alleged insult to Mahatma Gandhi by the AAP.

The BJP leaders led by state president Virendra Sachdeva also prayed at the Gandhi's memorial prior to AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal reached there before going to the CBI headquarters for questioning in connection with the alleged liquor scam.

"When Kejriwal gets trapped, he remembers Mahatma Gandhi, although he has ordered for removing Gandhi's portrait from offices of his government," Sachdeva charged.

He further attacked Kejriwal over AAP workers holding protests across the city, and said, "Kejriwal's politics is inspired by his actor friend



Prakash Raj's villainous roles in the movies. The call of AAP for road blockade in Delhi is inspired by the role of Raj in film Policigiri."

Sachdeva said Kejriwal was called by the CBI for liquor scam of his government but he went to the Samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi, and nothing can be "more shameful" than this.

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that due to the hard work of BJP workers, Kejriwal who is "mastermind"

of the liquor policy scam will also be in jail soon.

"Whenever Kejriwal was asked about the liquor scam in the assembly, he ran away. Kejriwal will now have to face the consequences of his actions and will have to resign and also go to jail," Bidhuri said.

Former Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta said the party workers' struggle has paid off today. Kejriwal's aides Satyendar Jain and Manish Sisodia are already in the jail waiting to welcome him there, he said.

Heatwave at some places in Capital, rain to bring relief

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Heatwave conditions prevailed at isolated places in Delhi on Sunday, and a fresh spell of rain will provide some relief starting Monday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

Delhi's primary weather station, the Safdarjung Observatory, logged a maximum temperature of 40.4 degrees Celsius, three notches more than normal. The minimum temperature settled at 22 degrees Celsius, which is normal for this time of the year.

Several places in the national capital recorded a maximum temperature three to four degrees Celsius above normal.

The automatic weather station in Pitampura recorded a heatwave, with the maximum temperature (41.9 degrees Celsius) settling five notches above normal.



The threshold for a heatwave is met when the maximum temperature of a station reaches at least 40 degrees Celsius in the plains, at least 37 degrees Celsius in coastal areas, and at least 30 degrees Celsius in hilly regions, and the departure from normal is at least 4.5 degrees Celsius.

The Najafgarh and Sports Complex stations both recorded maximum temperatures of 42 degrees Celsius and 42.4 degrees Celsius, respectively. The IMD said a western

disturbance active over the western Himalayan region is predicted to bring a fresh spell of rain in the plains starting Monday.

Earlier this month, the Met office predicted above-normal maximum temperatures for most parts of the country from April to June, except parts of the northwest and the peninsular regions.

Above-normal heatwave days are expected in most parts of central, east, and northwest India during this period.

SDM, his staffer assaulted in Amar Vihar; case lodged

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Police on Saturday registered a case after the SDM of Karawal Nagar and his staff were allegedly assaulted when they had gone to inspect a jeans unit in north-east Delhi, officials said.

Sanjay Sondhi, Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) of Karawal Nagar, filed a complaint with the police stating that around 1.45 pm, he along with staff members, visited a house in Amar Vihar to raid an illegal jeans colouring unit, they said.

The owner of the house, a Head Constable identified as Kuldeep Singh, along with some others, assaulted him and his staff and did not allow them to inspect the

place, the officials said.

Kuldeep is posted in the Security Unit of Delhi Police, a senior police officer said.

The SDM and his staff were taken to GTB Hospital for medical examination, he said.

Based on the complaint, a case was registered under sections 186 (obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions), 353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty), 332 (voluntarily causing hurt to deter public servant from his duty), 342 (wrongful confinement) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 at Karawal Nagar police station, police said.

20-yr-old man stabbed to death in Capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 20-year-old man was allegedly stabbed to death in front of Loknayak Bhawan in Delhi's Tughlak Road area, police said on Sunday.

Akash, who was standing in front of the building, was stabbed by an unidentified person around 8 pm, a senior police officer said.

He was stabbed on the upper right side of the abdomen, he said.

A video purporting to show police personnel lifting the unconscious victim, who is bleeding profusely, is available with PTI.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Pranav Tayal said, "The motive is unclear though it looks like personal enmity. The man was



taken to Ram Manohar Lohia hospital where he was declared brought dead."

A case of murder has been registered and efforts are being made to nab the suspect, he said.

The police are also looking for CCTV cameras installed in the vicinity of the crime scene to identify the suspect and establish the sequence of events.

Gang supplying guns to Punjab-based criminals busted

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Special Cell of the Delhi Police has said they have arrested three persons, including two arms suppliers and one receiver. The gang has supplied 300 guns to Punjab-based criminals, police said.

Alok Kumar, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Cell (Southern Range), said that the accused were identified as Rajinder alias Raju, Narender Singh alias Nitu alias Saphera and Pradeep Singh.

A senior police official said that 21 pistols and an Etiot car used in carrying firearms were recovered from their possession. Recovered firearms were meant to be supplied to the criminals and arms traffickers

in Delhi and Punjab.

"Inspector Ranjeet Singh Satvinder, ACP Attar Singh received the tip-off about the gang members and a team was formed to nab them."

A specific information was received that Rajinder and Pradeep had procured a consignment of pistols from Madhya Pradesh and they had brought them in Delhi in their Etiot car.

They were about to supply it to one Punjab-based arms trafficker near Modi Mills Flyover. A trap was laid and they were held. Nitu was also held when he came to meet them," the police official added.

Nitu was also previously arrested in a case of highway robbery and Arms Act in Patiala, Punjab.

City sees 1,634 Covid cases, positivity 29.68%

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi on Sunday logged 1,634 COVID-19 cases with a positivity rate of 29.68 per cent, according to data shared by the city government's health department.

With the new cases, Delhi's COVID-19 tally climbed to 20,23,227. Three fresh fatalities pushed the death toll to 26,563, the health department bulletin stated.

Of the latest fatalities, COVID-19 was the primary cause of death in one of the cases, it stated.

According to the bulletin, the fresh cases emerged out of 5,505 tests conducted the previous day.

On Saturday, Delhi had recorded 1,396 COVID-19 cases with a positivity rate of 31.9 per cent -- the highest in 15 months.

The capital saw a positivity



rate of 30.6 per cent on January 14 last year.

The department did not issue a bulletin on Friday.

Delhi reported 1,527 COVID-19 cases with a positivity rate of 27.77 per cent on Thursday, and two deaths.

The national capital's daily tally of COVID-19 cases crossed 1,000 for the first time

in more than seven months on Wednesday, while the positivity rate stood at 23.8 per cent.

Delhi had recorded 1,964 cases on August 18 last year.

The number of COVID-19 cases had dropped to zero on January 16 for the first time since the outbreak of the pandemic. However, the city has witnessed a spurt in cases over

the last fortnight.

The health department bulletin on Sunday said 270 of 7,951 beds in Delhi's dedicated COVID-19 hospitals are occupied, while 3,393 patients are in home isolation.

The number of active cases currently stands at 5,297, it said.

Mock drills were conducted at Delhi hospitals on April 11 to ascertain their preparedness to tackle COVID-19.

Medical experts have said Omicron sub-variant XBB.1.16 could be driving the surge in cases in the city.

However, they maintained that there is no need to panic and people should follow Covid-appropriate behaviour and get their booster shots.

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj had said last week that XBB.1.16 is not leading to severe infection among children.

Modi hails 'Make in India's' global strides

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday expressed happiness over the strides made by the 'Make in India' initiative globally.

His praise for the initiative came in response to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's tweet about taking a ride in a 'Made in India' train from Maputo to Machava with Mozambican Transport Minister Mateus Magala.

Tagging Jaishankar's tweet, Modi said, "This will make every Indian happy! Make in India continues to make global strides."

Modi has lauded six Road Over Bridges (ROBs) that were inaugurated for Vidarbha region Saturday.

Replying to a tweet by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, the prime minister tweeted, "Great for connectivity in



Vidarbha region."

Modi has praised SCO Millets Food Festival in Mumbai's Taj Mahal Palace.

The local MP Manoj Kotak had tweeted about the festival and Jalgaon's jowar, Nagpur's bajra, Aurangabad's ragi reaching Mumbai's Taj Mahal Palace in the form of SCO Millets Food Festival.

In reply the prime minister tweeted, "A laudatory effort to popularise Shree Ann in Mumbai."

Prime Minister Modi also

responded to citizens' tweets on Kashi Vishwanath and Bihu Celebrations.

Replying to a citizen who got the opportunity to take his father to Kashi Vishwanath, the prime minister tweeted, "love-ly" In another tweet, the PM said, "Enjoyed watching RJ Sufi highlight his Vande Bharat journey."

The prime minister also shared artwork of famous landmarks of Diu presented by Padma Shri awardee Premjit Baria.

India stresses need to address climate change in tandem with green action

G7 Ministers' meeting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Underlining that protecting and restoring ecosystems can help in reducing the extent of climate change and cope with its impacts, India on Sunday asserted that it is therefore important that we address issues related to climate change in tandem with environmental action, holistically.

Climate change, desertification and biodiversity loss are deeply interlinked and pose existential challenges to humanity. In response to these challenges, Rio Conventions have made remarkable progress, through a consensus driven approach, based on principles, Union Minister for Environment Bhupendra Yadav said at the G7 Ministers' Meeting on Climate, Energy and Environment in Japan's Sapporo.

Yadav reminded the gathering that recently at the CBD conference in Montreal we adopted the Global Biodiversity Framework and at CoP27 at Sharm el Sheikh, landmark decisions on issues like the



Loss and Damage fund were taken. However, there still is a long way to go, he rued.

He said that India has been part of providing solutions, while it historically has not been part of any of the problems. He said India has rather taken strong domestic actions, set challenging ambitious targets for itself and is also steering international actions through various initiatives.

"India's approach has been focused on the convergence of the issues related to Climate Change, Biodiversity loss and pollution. This has reflected in taking up initiatives based on specific interventions through International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), Lead IT," he added.

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The Union Minister said India has also focused on action by all, including individual and community actions through Mission LiFE.

Fill vacancy in National Commission for Scheduled Castes expeditiously: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to ensure that vacancy in the National Commission for Scheduled Castes is filled on an expeditious basis.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices P S Narasimha and J B Pardiwala noted the submission of the Centre that there is one vacancy in the Commission. "The Union of India shall take appropriate steps to ensure that the composition of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes is completed on an expeditious basis," the bench said.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by Ambedkar Association for Development seeking to fill appointments to the post of Chairperson/Vice-Chairperson and Member of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes within a stip-



ulated period.

BJP leader and former Union minister Vijay Sampla is the chairperson of the Commission.

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes is an Indian constitutional body established with a view to provide safeguards against the exploitation of Scheduled Castes and Anglo Indian communities to promote and protect their social, educational, economic and cultural interests. Cong will win at least 130 seats in K'taka; gateway to South for BJP will be closed: Veerappa Moily By Asim Kamal

Cong slams Govt over Antigua and Barbuda court's Choksi ruling

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday attacked the Centre after a court in Antigua and Barbuda reportedly ordered that fugitive diamondaire Mehul Choksi cannot be removed from the Caribbean country, alleging that this happened due to the governments' negligence.

The opposition party also alleged that "repeated negligence" shows that this is being done "intentionally".

According to media reports, a court in Antigua and Barbuda has ruled in favour of Choksi, wanted in a Rs 13,000-crore scam in the Punjab National Bank, ordering that he cannot be removed from that country.

Congress chief spokesperson Jairam Ramesh said, "Modi ji's Mehul Bhai" has been enjoying abroad for many years with the money looted from our banks. Earlier his red corner



notice was cancelled, now this decision of the court has come."

"All this has happened because of the negligence of the Modi government. It is clear from the repeated negligence that this is being done intentionally," Ramesh alleged.

The name of fugitive businessman Choksi was removed from the Interpol database of Red Notices on the basis of his plea to the Lyon-headquartered agency.

Red Notice is the highest level of alert by the 195-member strong International Police cooperation organisation Interpol to locate and provisionally arrest a fugitive pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action.

Sleep disturbances, dyspnoea and anxiety in long Covid, reveals study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Those Covid-19 patients who had sleep disturbance during their hospitalisation might now be suffering with breathlessness — or dyspnoea — as well because of the infections' associations with reduced muscle function and anxiety, a study published in the Lancet Respiratory Medicine has said.

The study of patients in 38 institutions across the UK, led by University of Manchester and Leicester found that 62 per cent of Covid patients had sleep disturbance, which was likely to persist for at least 12 months.

"The study has discovered that sleep disturbance could be an important driver of post-Covid breathlessness — or dyspnoea — because of its associations with reduced muscle function and anxiety," said Dr John Blakley, a clinical scientist from the University of Manchester and respiratory



condition symptoms.

The sleep disruption was likely to drive breathlessness directly, but that reduced muscle function and increased anxiety, both recognised causes of breathlessness, could partially mediate the association between sleep disturbance and breathlessness.

The authors speculate that targeting sleep disruption by reducing anxiety and improving muscle strength in these patients could alleviate breathlessness, but further investigation is needed.

Understanding the causes of breathlessness is complex since it can arise from conditions that affect the respiratory, neurological, cardiovascular, and mental health systems.

"Our findings suggest that sleep disturbance is a common problem after hospitalisation for Covid-19 and is associated with breathlessness. We also show this is likely to persist for at least 12 months," said first study author Callum Jackson from University of Manchester.

EAM Jaishankar congratulates newly-appointed Nepalese counterpart Saud

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Sunday congratulated his newly appointed Nepalese counterpart Narayan Prasad Saud, hours after he took charge of the post.

Saud, a leader of Nepali Congress, was sworn in as the foreign minister, weeks ahead of a planned visit to India by Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda.

"Congratulate H.E. N.P. Saud on his appointment as the Foreign Minister of Nepal. Look forward to working together to strengthen our multifaceted partnership. Best wishes for success in your new role," Jaishankar tweeted.

In Kathmandu, Indian envoy Naveen Srivastava paid a courtesy call on Saud and conveyed a message from Jaishankar.

"Naveen Srivastava, Ambassador of India paid a



courtesy call on Hon Foreign Minister Mr N P Saud @NPSaudnc today. Amb Srivastava conveyed message of congratulations from MEA of India H. E. @DrSJaishankar to the FM on his appointment as the Foreign Minister of Nepal," the Nepalese foreign ministry tweeted.

Prime Minister Prachanda was holding the charge of the foreign ministry as his coalition partner Nepali Congress delayed its nomination to the post.

Under the power sharing understanding, Nepali Congress was to recommend a leader for the foreign minister's post. The Nepalese prime minister is set to visit India in the next couple of weeks.

NGT forms panel to take action against 'illegal' dyeing units

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has formed a panel to verify the facts and take remedial action against several dyeing units, allegedly operating in violation of the rules, in Ghaziabad.

The green panel was hearing a petition that claimed 19 dyeing units operating at Roop Nagar, Arya Nagar and Tronica City in Ghaziabad's Loni area were flouting environmental norms.

A bench of Chairperson Justice AK Goel said, "Since it is stated that... the units are being allowed to operate against environmental norms, we consider it necessary to require a joint committee of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), state pollution control board (PCB) and (the) district magistrate, Ghaziabad, to verify facts and take remedial action..."

"State PCB will be the nodal agency for coordination and compliance."

The joint committee will verify the compliance status of the operating industries, the status of the common effluent treatment plant (CETP) and the mode of effluent disposal, the panel said. It noted that the same issue was considered by its order in August 2019 and directed the panel to also ascertain the status of compliance with the earlier order.

"An action taken report may be filed before this tribunal within two months... The state PCB may also put the concerned units to notice of these proceedings and furnish a copy of the report to such units..." the bench, also comprising Judicial Member Justice Sudhir Agarwal and Expert Member A Senthil Vel, said.

The matter has been posted for further proceedings on July 17. According to the petition, the authorities concerned did not take action against the dyeing units operating without consent and discharging untreated toxic effluents. Besides, the CETP in the area is non-functional, it said.

K'taka polls: Former CM Shettar joins Cong after being denied ticket by BJP

DEEPAK UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

In a setback to the BJP former Karnataka Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar resigned from the state assembly on Sunday and may contest against the BJP nominee on a Congress ticket.

Shettar is the second BJP leader to quit the assembly and the party after deputy chief minister Laxman Savadi also resigned from the BJP and joined the Congress after being denied a ticket.

According to sources, Shettar, an important leader from the North of Karnataka, would cross-over to the Congress a day after.

The six-time MLA was hoping to run for the Hubballi-Dharwad central constituency but was denied ticket despite the party veteran air dashing to the National



Home Minister Amit Shah called Shettar on Saturday and tried to persuade him to stay back but Shettar did not step-back.

Shettar reached Sirsi in Uttara Kannada district and handed over his resignation letter to assembly speaker Vishveshwar Hegde Kageri, a BJP leader.

"I have decided to resign from the legislative assembly and the BJP. I have built and raised this party from scratch. But they (some party leaders) created a situation for me to resign from the party," he said.

Bomma and Union Ministers Pralhad Joshi and Dharmendra Pradhan also tried to convince Shettar to stay in the party, but he remained firm in his decision to contest the assembly election.

Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said Union

Capital and appealing to the top party leadership to consider his claim to contest his 'last assembly elections.'

BJP has gone for a 'generational change' in ticket allocation, bringing-in over 52 new faces for the May 10 assembly elections in Karnataka.

Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said Union

India logs 10,093 Covid cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Sunday reported 10,093 cases in the past 24 hours, slightly lower than Saturday's numbers but for the past few days the caseload has been above 10,000 marks. On Saturday, 10,753 fresh cases were reported. This is the fourth consecutive day on which the country has clocked over 10,000 cases in the recent spike in infections over the past couple of weeks.

The daily positivity rate has been pegged at 6.78 while the weekly positivity rate stood at 4.49.

At least 19 deaths were reported in the past 24 hours, including 4 reconciled deaths as per the ICMR guidelines and falling within 90 days following the date of death. Active cases went up by 3822 to 57542 while 6248 recovered in the past 24 hours. Delhi had 4631



active cases, Kerala 19,481 and Maharashtra 6047.

While six deaths were recorded in Delhi and four in Maharashtra, three were reported from Rajasthan and one each in Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

The total tally of Covid cases is at 4.48 crore. The national Covid-19 recovery

are what we must focus on," said a senior health official.

The number of active cases in the country stands at 57,542 and 19 deaths have been recorded in the past 24 hours. The daily positivity rate, an indicator of the spread of infection, is 5.61 per cent

The upward trend in Covid cases has prompted several states to hold review meetings to assess preparations for another surge in hospitalisations.

The government officials also said that the cases are likely to rise for the next 10-12 days and then subside. Even as several States have been moving towards making wearing of the mask mandatory, the officials asserted that there is no need to worry and cases will decline in the next few days.

However, those with comorbidities need to be alert and take adequate precautions, they added.

'Lack of awareness about abortion among reasons for spike in population'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As India is on the brink of surpassing China to become the most populous country in the world, experts cite lack of literacy, awareness regarding contraception and abortions and economic factors among reasons for the spike in the population. According to data from the National Family Health Survey, more abortions take place in urban areas, which is 4 per cent, compared to 2.5 per cent in rural areas.

The data stated that 1.9 per cent women with no schooling background went for abortions while 3.5 per cent women with 10-11 years of education opted for it.

The plans of making her daughter a doctor changed for Chaaya Devi after she had two more children.

"Children are god's gift but what if you don't have money to raise them and it leaves your other children suffering too," said the 25-year-old, a mother of three children.

Devi, who is expecting her fourth child, works as a domestic help in Noida. She now worries about how to ensure a good life for her children. "I consulted a government hospital doctor but she scolded me for getting pregnant again but she does not understand my concerns is never taken," said Devi, who lives in a joint family with her in-laws.

Digital platform to empower citizens for heritage conservation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Seeking to prevent the demolition of heritage buildings in the future and "empower" the owners of such properties, other citizens and young architects in working for their preservation, experts have developed a new digital platform.

The Restoration Toolbox is a soon-to-be-launched, open-source participatory platform, inspired by the concept of circular economy, and also allows people to "flag heritage buildings at risk" and "build a campaign" to save old structures if those are suffering decay or threat of demolition.

Aishwarya Tipnis, a Delhi-based conservation architect with 20 years of experience, rued that "many gaps exist in the system when it comes to conservation and restoration of



old buildings."

"One issue is that many heritage property owners, particularly private owners, are choosing to let go of their old buildings and offer them to builders for demolition and new projects if they don't find maintenance economically viable," she told PTI.

Tipnis, who conceptualised the project two years ago during the lockdown induced by the second wave of COVID-19, said the pandemic "forced us to imagine architectural practice in a virtual space and the result was this digital toolkit".

The project evolved in the past two years as multiple partners joined over time.

The pilot of The Restoration Toolbox has been developed by Jugaadopolis (Aishwarya Tipnis Architects) with technical support from Platonic.

The pilot was funded by Goethe Institut, Be Fantastic and ZKM Karlsruhe, the architect said.

It has been selected among the eight innovative projects for international cultural relations as part of the European Spaces of Culture - 2023. The project

is being formally launched on April 19 at the Alliance Francaise de Delhi, she said.

"When we analysed the gap, we realised that if heritage property owners are often hesitant to pay a conservation architect, if he or she has to visit from a different city just for consultancy, and we realised they could rather put that money in restoring the structure with right guidance, which the platform provides," she told PTI.

Tipnis holds a bachelor's degree in architecture and PhD from the School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi, besides a master's degree from the University of Dundee, Scotland. She has worked on conservation projects in Delhi, and Chinsurah and Chandannagar in West Bengal, and has been an advocate for preservation of built heritage.

"Through this project, we want to offer this toolbox digitally to such owners, and offer guidance of experts who have signed up on our platform, all free of cost.

Those who wish to further engage with architects or hire them can do so after connecting online via our platform.

"The idea is to reach out to as many people as possible, and try to plug the gaps that we found in the practice," she said.

The platform aims to "empower citizens" to restore their own buildings in the hope to "democratise the process of heritage conservation", improve accessibility to right expert advice and provide a space for collaboration for citizens and policymakers to better lives and neighbourhoods while choosing preservation and not demolition as a way forward, the architect said.

"The state of the historic buildings in most Indian cities is dismal, plagued by issues of structural degradation, a host of economic and legal issues. Cities are rapidly degrading, old buildings are being replaced with nondescript buildings (that are) not only changing the urban landscape of the city but also severely impacting pollution levels, harming local communities and the planet," reads the project website.

Research has proven that restoration and adaptive reuse of existing buildings contributes to achieving the circular economy. However, in the Indian context, lack of access to information, experience and technical skills makes the decision to retain and retrofit an old building confusing and appear unviable. The Restoration Toolbox "aims to change this status quo," it says.

BIHAR HOCH TRAGEDY

80 arrested, 11 police personnel suspended

PTI ■ MOTIHARI/PATNA

Police have arrested 80 people from East Champaran district of dry Bihar for allegedly being involved in spurious liquor trade, following a suspected hooch tragedy that claimed 14 lives so far in Motihari, officials said on Sunday.

The district administration suspended 11 police personnel, including a sub-inspector and an assistant sub-inspector, who were posted as in-charge of anti-liquor task force (ALTF) at Areraj and Sadar sub-divisions of Motihari respectively, on the charge of dereliction of duties, according to an official statement.

Nine 'chowkidars' posted at different villages of Motihari were among the suspended policemen, it said.

Disciplinary actions have been taken against these police personnel for alleged dereliction of duties, a senior official of the district police said.

Police also seized huge quantities of spurious liquor during searches after the suspected hooch tragedy in East Champaran.

Twenty people, "involved in the illegal trade of liquor" have been arrested in Turkauliya, Harsiddhi, Sugauli and Paharpur of Motihari, where



consumption of spurious liquor was reported on Saturday, according to the statement issued by the East Champaran district police.

Sixty more people were also apprehended for being "involved in the illegal trade of liquor in the district", it said.

The district police have also seized huge quantities of spurious liquor and other related chemicals following searches at more than 600 places in different parts of Motihari in the last 24 hours.

"Police recovered 370 litres of country-made liquor, 50 litres of spirit and 1,150 litres of other chemicals used in the manufacturing of spurious liquor," the statement said.

The death count in the latest tragedy may increase further as the condition of five persons is reportedly to be critical, a

senior police officer said. The police were informed on Saturday that some villagers died after allegedly consuming spurious liquor in different areas of the district.

Police teams were immediately sent to several hospitals in the city, the statement said.

Reacting to the suspected hooch tragedy, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had on Saturday said: "I have been maintaining that liquor is bad and shouldn't be consumed. I have asked officials to take strict action against those who violate prohibition laws".

The state government imposed a total ban on sale and consumption of alcohol on April 5, 2016.

Scores of people had died in the last major hooch tragedy in Saran district in December 2022.

Pawar told Uddhav NCP will never join hands with BJP: Raut

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday claimed NCP chief Sharad Pawar recently told Uddhav Thackeray that his party will never join hands with the BJP even if anyone takes an individual decision to do so.

Raut made the comments in his weekly column 'Rokhtok' in the party mouthpiece Saamana in the wake of speculations that senior NCP leader Ajit Pawar may break ranks to join hands with the ruling BJP in the state, amid a plea seeking disqualification of 16 MLAs of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena pending before the Supreme Court.

However, Ajit Pawar, who is the leader of opposition in the state Assembly, dubbed such speculations as baseless and denied meeting Union Home Minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah in Mumbai on Saturday night.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Congress are constituents of the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in the state.

Raut in the Marathi publication claimed, "(Sharad) Pawar told Uddhav Thackeray during their meeting (on Tuesday) that nobody wants to switch over. But, family is being targeted. If anyone takes a per-



sonal decision to leave, it is their individual issue. But we as a party will never go with the BJP".

"There is tremendous anger among people of Maharashtra against the present state government. Any one joining the BJP will be committing political suicide. This is what Thackeray and Pawar felt," the Rajya Sabha member wrote.

He further claimed that Sharad Pawar during the meeting with former chief minister Thackeray said he would like to tell those who want to switch over that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) "files" will go in a cupboard from the table, but will never be closed.

There are speculations in political circles about what would be the future move of Ajit Pawar and the senior NCP leader should himself clarify, Raut said. He said a sugar mill belonging to Ajit Pawar's family was raided and seized by the ED. But, now the chargesheet doesn't have any mention of Ajit Pawar or his family members.

BJP cannot rule Maha on its strength, had to ally with Shiv Sena: MP Kirtikar

PTI ■ JALNA

The Bharatiya Janata Party cannot rule Maharashtra on its strength and has to ally with Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Sena MP Gajanan Kirtikar said here on Sunday.

He also said votes of Shiv Sena were divided due to the split in the party last year but voters can be won over again.

"The BJP could not rule Maharashtra on its strength and will not be able to do so. It has to ally with Shiv Sena as the ruling coalition (BJP and Shiv Sena led by Shinde) has a committed vote bank," he told reporters after attending a party



event.

The MP from Mumbai also claimed that no single party could rule Maharashtra on its strength, be it BJP, Shiv Sena, or NCP.

"Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar had tried to capture power on his

own strength but he couldn't succeed," he said.

The Shiv Sena Parliamentary Party leader also mocked Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut, saying he has become a source of entertainment for the people.

The Shiv Sena split last year after Shinde rebelled against the party leadership, leading to the collapse of the MVA government led by Uddhav Thackeray. Shinde joined hands with BJP to become the chief minister.

The Election Commission later recognised the faction led by Shinde as the real Shiv Sena and allotted it the "bow and arrow" poll symbol.

BJP on tenterhooks in poll-bound K'taka as ticket distribution sparks rebellion

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The banner of revolt by disappointed ticket aspirants in a number of constituencies seems to be keeping the BJP leadership on tenterhooks, as it resorts to douse the fire with less than a month to go before the Assembly polls.

The decision of former Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar and former deputy Chief Minister Laxman Savadi to quit the BJP after the party decided not to field them in the May 10 elections, has given a jolt to the party.

Party leaders in private acknowledged that the disengagement after announcement of candidates is certainly a cause for worry.

The BJP has so far announced candidates in 212 constituencies out of the total 224 in two lists.

According to party sources, there seems to be

revolt in about two dozen Assembly segments.

Karnataka BJP strongman B S Yediyurappa on Sunday said no force can stop the party from coming back power with a clear majority.

The national party has pressed its leaders into action for damage control. Union Ministers Dharmendra Pradhan (poll in-charge), Pralhad Joshi, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, Yediyurappa, state president Nalin Kumar Kateel are engaged in trouble-shooting exercises.

Also, some RSS leaders are said to have been roped in to pacify the dissidents.

Bommai and Yediyurappa have said that they are talking to all the disgruntled leaders personally to ensure that they don't leave the party, and the central leadership is personally in touch with some seniors who are upset.

Court acquits Nepalese man accused of beheading colleague

PTI ■ THANE

A court in Maharashtra's Thane district has acquitted a 38-year-old Nepalese national accused of beheading his colleague and disposing off his remains at different places.

Additional sessions judge at Kalyan Shaikat S Gorwade acquitted Rajeshkumar Nepali aka Yagnaprasad Kaluram Pukhrel (Jaisi) of charges under sections 302 (murder) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence) of the Indian Penal Code. The judge in his order dated April 10 noted that the prosecution had failed to prove all the charges against the accused.

According to the prosecution, the alleged accused worked at a Chinese eatery at Katrap on Badlapur-Karjat Highway.

Rahul dares PM to make 2011 caste census data public

PTI ■ KOLAR (K'TAKA)

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday dared Prime Minister Narendra Modi to release the 2011 caste-based census data in the public domain and also demanded the 50 per cent cap on reservation be removed.

The Congress leader claimed there are only 7 per cent other backward castes, Dalits and tribals as secretaries in the central government.

This is Gandhi's first rally in Karnataka since he was disqualified from Parliament after being convicted in a defamation case last month.

The Congress-led UPA regime had compiled the Socio



Economic and Caste Census (SECC) in 2011. The reports from the census have been published except that of the caste data.

The 50 per cent ceiling refers to Supreme Court judgments pointing out that the overall reservation in government jobs and education for various communities should not breach the mark although there are exceptions with some states crossing the figure.

Graft allegations: DMK hits back at BJP's Annamalai with ₹500 crore legal notice

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu has slapped a legal notice on State BJP chief K Annamalai over his graft allegations against the party, its President and Chief Minister M K Stalin, demanding an apology and damages to the tune of ₹500 crore.

The 10-page notice issued by DMK Organisation Secretary R S Bharathi said Annamalai's allegations named "DMK Files" and targeted at Stalin and other party leaders were "false, baseless, defamatory, imaginary and scandalous." The notice dated April 15 was issued by senior advocate and DMK Rajya Sabha MP, P Wilson, "under instructions" from Bharathi.

Referring to Annamalai's



five hundred crore only) to our client (Bharathi), which our client intends to pay over to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's relief fund".

These should be done within 48 hours of "receipt of this notice, failing which our client will be constrained to initiate appropriate civil and criminal proceedings against you and your properties, holding you personally liable for all costs and consequences arising therefrom," it said.

Bharathi told Annamalai that as he and his party were unable to make a mark electorally in Tamil Nadu, "you have been making constant attempts to defame, scandalise and tarnish the reputation of the DMK President, and other leaders and members of the DMK party".

How Atiq's key vote in 2008 helped save UPA Govt, India's nuke deal with US

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Six criminal-politicians, including Atiq Ahmad who was shot dead Saturday, were furloughed from different jails in just 48 hours with little fanfare in 2008, with a book on "Baahubalis" claiming their votes were crucial to save the embattled UPA government and India's civil nuclear deal with the US.

The Opposition had brought a no-confidence motion against the Manmohan Singh dispensation and at stake was his United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government and the nuclear deal.

Among these six legislators, who collectively had over 100 criminal cases against their names, was the then Samajwadi Party's Lok Sabha MP Atiq Ahmad, who represented Allahabad's (now Prayagraj) Phulpur constituency.

The book — "Baahubalis of Indian Politics: From Bullet to Ballot" — authored by Rajesh



Singh and published by Rupa Publications mentions how the gangster-politician had the distinction of being one of the musclemen who saved the UPA government from a collapse.

The Left parties had withdrawn their outside support to the regime in mid-2008 over the government's decision to proceed with a civil nuclear deal.

"The UPA had 228 members in the Lok Sabha and was short of 44 seats for a simple majority to overcome the crisis of confidence. Prime Minister Singh, however, expressed confidence that he would survive. It soon became evident as to where that confidence came from," Singh writes.

Brief history of killers: From everyday crime to making 'name for ourselves'

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

A "drug addict" whose brothers are now priests, a child who ran from home. This is how two of the three men who killed gangster-politician Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf are remembered by their neighbours and families.

The young men told police they carried out the audacious attack Saturday, while the brothers were being escorted by police for a medical check-up, because they wanted to make a name for themselves in the world of crime.

The alleged assailants, Lavlesh Tiwari (22) of Banda, Mohit alias Sunny (23) of Hamirpur and Arun Maurya (18) of Kasganj, were arrested by policemen accompanying

the Ahmad brothers.

Tiwari was injured in the cross-fire, which also hurt a policeman. The assailants posed a TV crew and fired at almost point-blank range.

A Banda resident, who did not want to be named, told media persons that Tiwari's family was unlike the rogue son, whom he also described as a "drug addict".

"His family has been our neighbour. The family is simple. Two of his brothers are priests while one is still studying. Lavlesh has been into crime and has been to jail several times. He has also gone to jail in an eve-teasing case earlier," he said.

"He had ambitions to earn a big name in the world of crime," the neighbour claimed.

6 named in Umesh Pal murder case killed so far

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

With gangster-politician Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf shot dead by assailants in Prayagraj on Saturday, three of the family's four members named in the Umesh Pal murder case have been killed.

Ten people were named in the FIR registered at the Dhoomanganj police station of Prayagraj on February 25, a day after Umesh Pal was killed. Ahmad's son Asad was also named as a shooter, along with six others.

Apart from Ahmad and Ashraf, four others named in the FIR — Asad, Arbaaz, Vijay Chaudhary alias Usman and Ghulam — have also been killed. Ahmad's wife Shaista Parveen and three other alleged

shooters are absconding.

Umesh Pal was a key witness in the 2005 MLA Raju Pal murder case, in which Ahmad was also an accused.

Of the seven people seen in the CCTV footage that captured the killing of Umesh Pal, Arbaaz, who allegedly drove a sports utility vehicle (SUV) carrying the attackers, was killed in an encounter on February 27.

Shooter Vijay Chaudhary alias Usman was killed in an encounter in Prayagraj on March 6. Asad and Ghulam were killed in another encounter with the Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force in Jhansi on April 13.

The three remaining shooters — Guddu Muslim, Sabir and Armaan — are absconding. Parveen is also on the run.

Atiq, brother Ashraf buried in Prayagraj

PTI ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Gangster-politician Atiq Ahmad and his brother Khalid Azeem alias Ashraf were buried in their ancestral village in this Uttar Pradesh district amid tight security on Sunday.

The bodies of the brothers, which were handed over to the family members after conducting the post-mortem examination, were brought to the Kasari Masari graveyard here for performing the last rites at about 6.30 pm and it took about two hours to conclude the rituals.

The bodies of former Samajwadi Party (SP) MP Ahmad and Ashraf, who were gunned down by three assailants posing as journalists in Prayagraj on Saturday night, were taken to the graveyard in ambulances.



Some women members of the family wearing hijab were seen going inside the burial ground. The names of those allowed to be present on the occasion were noted in a register and they were permitted entry only after their identity was verified.

Ahmad's wife Shaista Parveen, an absconding accused in the Umesh Pal murder case, did not turn up for her husband's burial. Senior officials of the administration and police were present at the graveyard.

SCHOOL RECRUITMENT SCAM

CBI raids another TMC MLA Saha

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

After senior State Minister Partha Chatterjee, Manik Bhattacharya now it is the turn of another Trinamool Congress MLA Jivan Krishna Saha whose house has been raided by the officials of the Central Bureau of Investigation in connection to the school level recruitment scam.

Saha's house in Baroan in Murshidabad district was being raided for the past 48 hours and



he had been kept under apparent house arrest, sources close to his family said.

The raid which started

amid a dramatic incident of the TMC MLA lobbying two of his mobile phones and a pendrive straight into the pond just behind the high wall of his village house. While the CBI sleuths managed to recover one mobile set after about 36 hours of search operation that included the pumping out of the water of the pond these cond phone was still being looked for and was feared to have been stuck in the mud.

Schools, colleges shut as heatwave batters Bengal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

The West Bengal Government has ordered the shutting down of all the educational institutions in the State for one week in view of the prevailing heat-wave like conditions.

All the schools and colleges, including the private institutions would be shut for one week from Monday, a government notification said following a decision taken by

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who on Monday said, "the Government has urged all schools, colleges and educational institutions and universities including private institutes to announce holiday for this week due to the heat wave".

The Chief Minister said how children had been complaining of headaches and other ailments due to the hot spell for the past more than two weeks urging people to remain indoors throughout the day.

Taken aback by total collapse of law & order in UP: Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Gangster politician Atiq Ahmad and his brother's custodial murder was one shameful model of the law and order in Uttar Pradesh under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, his Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee on Sunday said.

Banerjee who has of late been under intense attack from the Opposition BJP for running a corrupt and criminalised government — that has seen a



number of her Cabinet colleagues and legislators going to jail on corruption charges — apparently lapped up the UP issue reiterating how she was shocked at the brazen anarchy and total collapse of the law and

order in the north Indian state. "I am shocked by the brazen anarchy and total collapse of law and order in Uttar Pradesh. It is shameful that perpetrators are now taking the law in their own hands, unfazed by the police and media presence. Such unlawful acts have no place in our constitutional democracy," Banerjee wrote on Twitter even as her party spokesperson Kunal Ghosh went steps ahead calling the incident "dangerous for democracy."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Ambitious but doable

\$900-billion exports target is achievable but this can happen only when there is a boom in manufacturing

The Government is reportedly contemplating an ambitious export target of \$900 billion for the current fiscal, which will be almost 17 per cent more than exports of \$770 billion in 2022-23. Optimism in official circles is occasioned by various factors, one of which is the World Trade Organisation's (WTO's) upwardly revised forecast for trade growth. It estimates that global merchandise trade volume growth will be 1.7 per cent of world GDP in the calendar year 2023; in October 2022, its estimate was 1 per cent. Second, the \$94-billion increase in exports in 2022-23 despite huge problems has made the officials upbeat. Third, they are confident that the Make in India, Make for World programme and the Rs-2 lakh crore production linked incentive (PLI) schemes to incentivise exports are doing well, especially in electronic exports. Electronics figured in the top 10 items of merchandise exports; it was 5.7 per cent in its share in 2022-23 at \$25.39 billion, up from 3.71 per cent in 2021-22. US technology giant Apple has augmented its iPhone production in India substantially; it rose from 1 per cent of global production to 7 per cent in two years. Apple partners like Foxconn Technology Group and Pegatron Corp are assembling their products in India. Chinese smartphone maker Vivo will also invest Rs 1,100 crore in a new 169-acre manufacturing facility in Greater Noida. The Government believes that the \$900-billion exports target is not unrealistic but it will fix the target after wide consultations with all stakeholders.

Policy and decision makers, however, would do well to focus more on merchandise exports. In the last fiscal, these were \$447.46 billion, up from \$422 billion in 2021-22; this was a rise of merely 6 per cent. Services exports, on the other hand, grew from \$254.53 billion in 2021-22 to \$322.72 billion in 2022-23, registering a rise of 26.8 per cent. In other words, most of the rise in exports is because of the excellent performance of services. This is a familiar story, a story that underlines the Indian economy's Achilles' heel—manufacturing. National Manufacturing Policy, which was announced in 2011, aimed to increase the share of manufacturing in GDP to 25 per cent by 2025. In 2021, it was 14 per cent, down from 15 per cent in 2015. In fact, since 1960 this share never touched even the 20 per cent mark. If the Government really wants to increase merchandise exports, it has to ensure buoyancy in manufacturing. It is doing a lot directly and indirectly to boost factory output. At the Central level, there are not many procedural rigours, but the same cannot be said about the State level; it is here that industrialists, especially from micro, small and medium enterprises or MSMEs, face problems. The Centre must coax, nudge or goad States to become more sensitive to the concerns of MSMEs—and not just in hi-tech sectors like electronics. There cannot be a boom in merchandise exports without a boom in manufacturing.

PICTALK



Passengers of Bharat Gaurav tourist train visit Dragon Palace Buddhist temple in Nagpur

Time to reconcile Kashmiri Pandits

Kashmiri Pandits have suffered for many years. To move forward concrete steps must be taken by the government writes Rahul Pandit

My daughters were enjoying meditative serenity in the gardens of the Hazratbal mosque at Srinagar with birds in the azure skies above and the green waters of the Dal Lake caressing it below. They had finished offering prayers at the shrine on their first trip to the valley in 2016. "What happened was wrong. I pray every day for Pandits to return" Sh. Ghulam Hassan Bandy, the pious and fatherly Custodian of the Holy Relic of Prophet Muhammad, was speaking to my in-laws, tears welling up in his eyes. I felt his sincerity, I was home.

This reverie was broken with the memories of the pogrom and the forced exodus of 400,000 Kashmiri Pandits from the valley in the 90s. Author of 24 books, freedom fighter and poet Pandit Sarwanand Koul Premi and his son Pandit Virendra Koul were abducted from their house in village Soaf Shali, Anantnag. Their bodies were found hanging from a tree a day later.

This mayhem continued for over a decade to accelerate the pace of ethnic cleansing. Panun Kashmir, an organization of displaced Kashmiris, has published a list of 1,341 murdered Kashmiri Pandits. Widely read newspapers Aftab and Alsafa carried advertisements asking Hindus to leave or risk being eliminated.

The Indian state's pusillanimity left the Kashmiri Pandits to fend for themselves. While mass hysteria engulfed the valley, many families were also saved and clandestinely helped escape by their Muslim neighbours. The government of India records 64,951 displaced Kashmiri families. In 1995, the National Human Rights Commission headed by the former Chief Justice of India M.N. Venkatchaliah held the systemic ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits akin to genocide.

Steeped in Shaivism that exhorts compassion and forgiveness, Pandits did not let the venom of hatred grow deep inside or plot violent retribution. They resolved instead to a code of morality and pursuit of education. That is why the entire communi-



ty over the past two generations, including all its women, are 100% literate. Those who forget history are condemned to repeat it. So, what should be done now to move forward and obviate a recurrence?

Acceptance and apology: Acceptance is half the walk to closure. It is important to prevent the assassination of India's memory by denying or minimizing this savagery of slaughter.

The Parliament must record an apology for India's failure in preventing the genocide of Kashmiri Pandits. This will help douse the embers that burn the hearts of mothers who lost their children to this pogrom.

Punish the guilty: The Supreme Court of India in 2019 rejected a PIL for the prosecution of the accused on the ground that the time gap will make it difficult to collect evidence. Most Kashmiris say that if the SC after 36 years in 2020 can decide on conviction for the 1984 anti-Sikh riots it should do so too for this genocide in the 90s.

A Judicial Commission under a retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court should be immediately constituted, akin to the Justice G.T. Nanavati Commission, formed in 2000 to probe the 1984 riots. Those found guilty should be given

exemplary punishment as per the law. 215 FIRs that have not been acted upon by the state should be clubbed and given to the NIA for a comprehensive probe. Teach the nation: As civilised human beings, we must understand how such inhumane ideas spread like wildfire in the state instigating the organised rape, murder and plunder of a native community? Historians need to research and peel off the layers of distortion created to serve narrow political interests. They need to study and credit the Gonand, Karkota and Lohara dynasties that ruled the valley for over 1,000 years.

Reparation & resettlement: The return of the exiled Pandits with pride, is a matter of enforcing India's Constitution in Kashmir, both nationally and in the global arena. The government must pay reparation for the families forced to flee their homes.

Resettlement cannot just be an exercise in restoring the physical status quo pre-1990 but an enabling approach for political empowerment. A State Minority Commission, led by a retired Supreme Court Justice must be constituted. Its ambit should include compiling a comprehensive list of the usurped lands, orchards and properties of the Kashmiri Pandits, and laying down the

process to restore the same. Economic revitalization: These initiatives will succeed only if backed by an economic agenda that creates jobs for the valley's youth and prosperity for all its citizens. Four key sectors to drive this agenda could be

- 1) Sustainable Tourism
- 2) Holistic Healthcare
- 3) Geographical Indication
- 4) Education.

India has the opportunity to make Kashmir the sustainable Tourism Capital of the World – flanked by the Zabarwan mountains and caressed by its gardens, lakes, rivers, valleys and wildlife with opportunities for golf, skiing, paragliding, river rafting, trekking, mountain climbing, camping and rural tourism.

An empowered Kashmir Economic Resurgence Council led by the Niti Aayog Chairperson should supervise a roadmap for accelerated implementation of this agenda. The acceptance of a shared culture and admittance of the integrity of the other's experience will initiate the process of healing helping wash the dirty blood stains of the genocide off India's fabric. Lord Rama was exiled for 14 years, and Kashmiri Pandits have now been in exile for over 30 years. It is time for India to get them home.

(The views expressed in the writeup are writer's own)



WHILE MASS HYSTERIA ENGULFED THE VALLEY, MANY FAMILIES WERE ALSO SAVED AND CLANDESTINELY HELPED ESCAPE BY THEIR MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POOR HEALTH OF RURAL HEALTHCARE

Sir — Strong primary health care ...: Apr 15. The visuals of a rural citizen trudging miles in desperation carrying the body of his dead wife on his shoulders must serve a purpose far larger than national self-recriminations. The fruits of economics through value addition and leveraging science and technology are usurped by the urban clique to then deny the rural sector benefits of education, health and resources.

The National Rural Health Mission is a major instrument for the delivery of free health care. But this is a state subject and most of them are in very poor condition. India at present has one in every doctor per 1,700 people, as against say, one per 469 in the UK. No doctor is ready to take up a rural gaudlet, as he looks at the pie of 60% of national healthcare spent on towns and cities. As even the urban populace stood helpless in the pandemic, it underscored how ill-served has been rural healthcare, all along. Why do we fail to see that the key to the national health of this agrarian nation, is rural medical care?

India's spending on public health care is one of the lowest in the world at 4% of GDP and 8% of total expenditure while 60% is from private out-of-pocket expenses. India ranks 85th in 185 wherein 71.6 % is by the private sector with 26.7% by the government which allows little to rural needs.

R Narayanan | Mumbai

CONTROVERSY OVER IT RULES

Sir — India's Information Technology (IT) Rules have been under scrutiny since the introduction of the new IT Rules in 2021. The government aimed to regulate the digital world with these new rules, but they have been met with criticism from various media organizations, civil society groups, and social media platforms. The IT Rules, of 2021 replaced the previous IT Rules of 2011 and brought online news content and Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms within their ambit. They also broadened the scope of the intermediary oversight mechanism, classifying social media intermedi-

Setback in Mehul Chowksi case



It is a great setback for the people of India whose money has been pocketed as Mehul Chowksi, the diamondaire who is wanted in India in connection with Rs 13000 crore fraud cannot be removed from Antigua and Barbuda as the country's High Court gave the ruling in his favour. The claimant, Mehul Chowksi in his civil lawsuit has argued that there is an obligation on the part of the defendants, the Attorney General of Antigua and the Chief of Police to carry out a thorough inquiry and that he has an

arguable claim that he was subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The court order has prohibited the removal of the Claimant, Mehul Chowksi from Antigua and Barbuda's territory.

According to Nature Isle News, the defendant also claimed that the claim was frivolous, vexatious, and an abuse of the court's process. Collusion, forced abduction, removal from Antigua and Barbuda, and assault are among the incidents detailed in the Claimant Mehul Chowksi's affidavits in support of the claim. The Claimant was forcibly transported to the Commonwealth of Dominica aboard a boat, as per the report of Nature Isle News.

The 63-year-old diamondaire is wanted in India in connection with a Rs 13,000-crore fraud in the Punjab National Bank (PNB). CBI in its statement said that it remains committed to returning fugitives and criminals to India to face the process of criminal justice.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

depend on their effective implementation and enforcement.

Amarjeet kumar | Hazaribag

RELIEF FOR INDIAN MEDICAL STUDENTS

Sir — It is a happy development that most of the Ukraine colleges will begin online classes, bringing immediate relief to Indian medical students. They have vacated Ukraine on Feb 22nd, 2022. For the last 1 year and 2 months, their education has been disrupted due to the ongoing war there with Russia. Now the question is, why Indian government was not providing them, with virtual classes, by having cameras etc. paraphernalia in medical colleges of India itself? India cannot lag behind in spreading 1 to 1 cum TEAM's HAPPY development management, joyful success Solutions, peace, prosperity and progress.

Madhu Nivriti PS | Secunderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Congress must revamp its state units

Congress is vital for the political fabric of the country but must strengthen its state-level units to remain relevant

The last few days saw a series of political earthquakes of low magnitude causing some shock waves in the national capital as well as in Kerala. It all began with the release of the life story of Ghulam Nabi Azad, the Man Friday to Indra Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Narasimha Rao, Manmohan Singh and who maintained a vast network of friends cutting across party lines. "Azaad", the autobiography of Ghulam Nabi Azad tells the readers about the degeneration suffered by the Indian National Congress over the last three decades.

The release of "Azaad" was followed by the exit of Kiran Kumar Reddy, the last chief minister of united Andhra Pradesh and Anil Antony, son of A K Antony, former defence minister and the senior most Congress leader from the GOP to join the BJP.

While Anil Antony's exit from the Congress and joining the BJP were in expected lines, it is not going to make any change in the fortunes of the Hindutwa party either at the national level or in Kerala.



The BJP leadership can take solace in the fact that Anil is a brand name because of the Antony tag. Congress workers in Kerala do not know much about him as he was one of the back-room boys of the party working in its digital media cell. The BJP leaders can claim that Christian community members are joining the party inspired by the charisma of Prime Minister Modi.

Though the BJP had tried its luck by inducting Christians into the party, it is yet to make any impact either in Kerala or in the rest of the country. The Kerala media is full of reports about the attack on Christian priests and evangelists in the rest of the country by Hindutva zealots. Cardinal Baselios Cleemis (64), head of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church, who is in the race for the next Pope, has already declared that minorities, especially the

Christians, were not safe in India under the Modi administration. The legislation enacted by BJP-ruled States banning religious conversion has antagonised the Church as evangelization is the spirit that sustains the community. The possibility of Anil Antony adding to the kitty of the BJP looks bleak.

Congress started stagnating the moment the party leadership cut to size the regional satraps. There was a time when the party had the services of chieftains like K Kamaraj, K Karunakaran, Devaraj Urs, S Nijalingappa, Vasanth Dada Patil, Biju Patnaik, Atulya Ghosh, Sidharth Shankar Ray etc. Congress leaders like NKP Salve, and Vasanth Sathe, commanded respect not only in India but across the world. This writer remembers reading a news item about Salve's mission to bring the 1987 World Cup Cricket Championship to India. "With Salve in charge, there is no possibility of the World Cup going anywhere else", one of the top cricket managers had been quoted as saying. Do we have such leaders in Congress now?



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

but must

What Kiran Kumar Reddy told the media after joining the BJP last Friday is noteworthy. Congress does not have the right leaders in the right places. The party which was in power in Tamil Nadu till 1967 thanks to the likes of Kamaraj and C Subramaniam, has ended up as a doormat of the DMK. At best, the party could be described as the B team of the DMK. The BJP does not have much to celebrate over C R Kesavan, great-grandson of C Rajagopalachari, joining the party. Kesavan, who was in Congress from 2001 to 2023 left the party because of the cold-shouldering by the national leadership. There is nothing much to write about his contributions to Congress.

There never will be an India without Congress. But the party could be strengthened only by its leadership. Leaders should understand their drawbacks and shortcomings. Modi bashing alone will not make the party return to its days of glory. It is not yet late.

(The writer is a senior journalist with The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

STRATEGIES FOR FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

Prioritising professional development can be game-changing strategy at work



LAURA MESSERSCHMITT

Being a small business owner requires nothing short of majoring in multitasking. Whether it's managing customers or employees, running a budget, or navigating products and systems, it's often an all-consuming task. Throw in a family and a household to run and it's fair to say professional development is probably not on most women's to-do lists. However, the right kind of professional development can be transformational for women in business, and it doesn't always require a new degree or a course.

Consider these five practical strategies to help switch up your thinking and boost your productivity this year.

Work-life balance: The quest for work/life balance became a national conversation during the COVID-19 pandemic as many Indians were forced to work from home. A 2022 study from LinkedIn found 72 per cent of working women in India reject roles that don't allow for flexible working. Rather than seeking to explicitly balance work and home responsibilities and obligations, being more mindful about how you are spending your time can help to deliver better harmony. For example, could you strive to have more quality time rather than quantity with your partner, friends, or children? Can you lean on others during busy periods and accept that busy periods come in ebbs and flows? If you have perfectionist tendencies, can you reassess your priorities and be ok with some things sometimes being just, ok?



Listen to your feelings about imposter syndrome: That nagging feeling like you just aren't good enough or just can't do it might be a positive. Many senior business leaders today actively work to surround themselves with a network of people they can learn from and leverage their expertise. Finding yourself in a situation where you accept you don't have all the answers can often help you to engage with others who might be able to teach you something new.

Check in with how you are spending your time: If your to-do list never seems to be done, it might be time for a productivity review. Productivity experts suggest a great place to start is looking at your calendar every Friday to review the week just gone. How did you spend the bulk of your time? Was it focused on your core business priorities or is something less important becoming a time-suck? Stopping to perform this check each week can be a game-changer for your productivity and your to-do list.

Try to embrace failure: Many small business owners, particularly women, hold off on launching their businesses or making a change out of fear of failure. However, reframing failure as an essential part of the learning experience can help to remove the associated fears.

If you wait until your business idea feels perfect or your website is exactly right, you might never launch or miss the opportunity to learn from your customers about what they want.

Make your mental health a priority: Another by-product of the COVID-19 pandemic was a renewed business and community focus on building resilience and mental health. Educating yourself about mental health and checking in with your state of mind are important first steps to supporting yourself and your employees better. It's common for people to put off the things that best support their mental health - like exercise and mindfulness - when they are busy or stressed, but these are often the times when those strategies are the most impactful.

Whether you are a one-woman operation or leading a team, prioritising your professional development can help lead to game-changing strategies at work and home. A focus on continuous improvement each day can help break down the barriers of learning a new skill and help you become a more powerful small business leader.

(The writer is President of, the International Division of GoDaddy)

Revisiting the Poona Pact



KC TYAGI

Ambedkar's fears have come true as the Dalits, Adivasi and minorities' political interests are not being addressed in Parliament, writes KC Tyagi and Pankaj Chaurasia



Every year on April 14, Dr B.R. Ambedkar Jayanti is commemorated to honour the birth of B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution. His 132nd birthday was celebrated this year. He was a well-known statesman who fought for the rights of the Dalits and other socially backward classes.

Ambedkar aimed to thrive in a just society where each citizen was granted the same equal significance and dignity. He believed that liberty, equality, and fraternity must be upheld to sustain egalitarian justice within a community, but the caste system in India is the biggest barrier to the idea of justice taking root in the Indian social structure which is why Dr Ambedkar prioritised caste for the justice of the oppressed group because the fundamental premise of basic social justice undermines social, economic, and political justice, as well as democracy.

In 1932, the subject of whether the 'untouchables' should be granted separate electorates because they were not an intrinsic part of Hindu social structures but rather were a community with a distinct sociopolitical identity, sparked a heated dispute between Gandhi and Ambedkar. In modern India, many people have reframed the disagreements between Gandhi and Ambedkar into starkly contrasting narratives, with supporters of each man strongly criticising the other's views on caste and anti-caste campaigns. In this context, it is necessary to reexamine the Poona Pact, the agreement reached between Gandhi and Ambedkar in 1932, from a modern standpoint.

In 1932, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr B.R. Ambedkar signed the Poona Pact to cease the Dalit campaign for separate electorates in exchange for legislative bodies. This agreement brought together two of the most prominent leaders of the Indian liberation struggle, who disagreed on Dalit rights. The Poona Accord has always been criticised and debated. The demand for separate electorates for Dalits was raised for the first time in 1917, and it gained traction during the Round Table Conferences in 1930.

In 1932, the British government, which was hesitant to award separate electorates, proposed the Communal Award, which would have granted Dalits distinct elec-



WHILE CERTAIN CASTES HAVE STARTED TO GET INVOLVED WITH POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY, MANY REMAIN OUTSIDE OF THE SYSTEM

(KC Tyagi is a former MP and JDU leader and Pankaj Chaurasia is a research fellow at Jamia Millia Islamia University)

torates. This concept, however, was rejected by Gandhi, who went on to a death fast to prevent the introduction of separate electorates. It all came down to a fundamental difference in their points of view. While Gandhi saw caste as a social issue, Ambedkar saw it as a political one.

Following negotiations at Poona, Gandhi and Ambedkar signed the Poona Accord in September 1932. This arrangement reserved Dalit legislative seats rather than having distinct electorates. The Poona Pact, which brought together two of India's most well-known leaders and settled a contentious issue, was a significant turning point in the liberation fight. Detractors claim that the Poona Accord was a compromise because it did not contain separate electorates for Dalit representation. Critics claim that the reservation system has not provided Dalits with sufficient resources and opportunities for success. The Poona Pact dispute for Dalit rights in India is still relevant today.

According to historian Prabodhan Pol, Ambedkar's interpretation of caste hinged on his perception of the Dalit question as a political matter, not only a social one, as Gandhi did. "The Gandhi-Ambedkar dispute centred on how to interpret caste. Ambedkar asserted, for the first time in India's modern history, that caste was a political issue that could not be resolved just by social changes. Ambedkar stressed in his writings and speeches that political democracy was meaningless unless the so-called oppressed classes were equal participants in it.

Ambedkar preferred a rights-based approach, whereas Gandhi preferred a faith-based and spiritual approach. Unlike Ambedkar, Gandhi believed that any exploitative connection could only be repaired if the exploiter changed his mind. As a result, he worked with upper castes to modify their beliefs. "I thus implore you not to deprive Hinduism of one final opportunity

to make voluntary atonement for its wicked past." "Give me the opportunity to work among the Hindu castes," he urges Ambedkar. It is unclear why Gandhi took such a strong stance against separate electorates, and this is still debated today.

The legacy of the Poona Accord lingers on to this day for India's 300 million scheduled caste people, today, India accords scheduled castes (SCs) a proportional number of seats in Parliament and assemblies based on their population for instance, in the Lok Sabha, representatives of socially and economically disadvantaged communities are granted 84 of a total of 543 seats. However, Dalits are not particularly concentrated in any one region, which means that they are in the minority in the majority of these seats. This indicates that the majority of voters do not belong to the Scheduled Castes and that their influence is the deciding factor in elections, even though the majority of MPs do for this reason, many Ambedkarite intellectuals keep arguing that the way Dalits are represented has been badly distorted. Because of this, in a society that is heavily influenced by caste, it is impossible for a Dalit member of parliament to truly advocate for members of more oppressed castes because he or she is required to make concessions and appease members of higher castes.

A system like this deprives Dalits of actual leadership, and the community suffers as a result. Leaders are unable to be independent since they must rely on their party's vote bank to be elected. Many Dalit politicians and thinkers are aware of this shackle, and many Dalit politicians and thinkers think that the current system is not good for choosing real leaders. They think that we must make a lot of compromises and that the current arrangement is very different from what the Poona Pact originally proposed. Gandhiji made it possible for this to happen, but

Ambedkar's plan was very different.

In 1932, Ambedkar joined the Poona Agreements, knowing its fatal defect and its outcome. So, in 1949, after independence and when drafting the Constitution, he proposed a Dalit electorate and settlement.

The way things are now prove that Babasaheb was right to be worried. In the 60 years since India became independent, it has become clear that the Dalits, Adivasis, and other minorities' political interests are not represented in the Parliament with the way elections work now. Even though some untouchable castes have improved in the 75 years since the Poona Agreement, many castes have lagged. Nonetheless, some castes in this class have maintained their progress today in all states. While certain castes have started to get involved with politics and democracy, many remain outside of the system. As a consequence, there have been more occurrences of violence against Dalits, and the situation has gotten worse. There hasn't been much of a change in the way the community is represented in politics, and because of this, caste-based Dalit parties have been soundly trounced by the BJP.

The Dalits, tribals, labourers, farmers, and members of the most backward castes have been the most negatively impacted by the authoritarian politics of the BJP that have resulted from this. Now, if we examine the state and trajectory of Dalit politics, it appears to be on the verge of collapse. The majority of Dalit leaders have joined the ruling party or have formed alliances with it. In hope of achieving social, economic, political and cultural justice and equitable representation for all oppressed castes, particularly Dalits, Tribals, and Most Backward castes also, we need to have a national discussion about a proportional system of representation for justice for all.

(The views expressed are personal)

The mind needs detox too...

A mental cleanse or mind detoxification helps in clearing the mind to help find better focus and balance in life

Change isn't always easy, but is necessary to move forward. When the mind of an individual brims over with stressful thoughts and anxiety, it is not always easy to sort them out and determine what's causing the most distress. What matters the most is the need to detox or a mental cleanse.

A mental cleanse or mind detoxification is an exercise that helps an individual in clearing their mind to help find better focus and balance in their life. The human mind is often referred to as the monkey mind. Studies show that the average human mind has at least 50,000 thoughts every day, which means in every 1.2 seconds a new thought leads to many distractions. Today, we all are living in the era of busy-



SAKSHI SETHI

(The author is a teacher at a reputed school in Delhi)

ness, so mental and emotional toxins often go unnoticed and result in making the person a victim of stress, fatigue, over-commitment, communication breakdown, unhappiness, impulsive decisions, mistakes, errors and much more.

It is often believed that evolution and change are the keys to individual healing. Strengthening the process of elimination can help an individual deal with the problems related to their past and in current thereby making them feel lighter and motivated. There is no denying the fact that with day-to-day life comes lots of stress, negativity and anxiety so a person sometimes loses track of the positives. However, it becomes important to calm the monkey mind and one of the effective ways which can



help is by inculcating the art of mindfulness meditation. Meditation, deep breathing exercises and being self-aware

of thoughts can help in boosting mindfulness and relieve stress by teaching an individual to sit with distracting

thoughts, acknowledging them and letting the negative thoughts pass on their own. Today, mental health is something that is of utmost importance and one doesn't need an excuse to give a little extra love to oneself.

Detoxing the mind by eliminating negative thoughts; eliminating negative emotions; setting boundaries; restoring mental health are a few such measures that can be taken by an individual to gain back the lost self-love and self-care. Being a people pleaser, all the time drains an individual's mental energy. Keeping the emotions bottled up and holding on to anger, grudges, resentments, etc also makes an individual's life miserable both physically and mentally.

Detoxification occurs on

various levels and helps rejuvenate the body and prevent degeneration. Not only the mind but physical health can also be improved with the help of detoxification. Carving out time away from a smartphone, accessing social media and a steady stream of texts, calls and emails; practicing the art of forgiveness and focusing on things that matter; adopting healthy sleep habits; engaging in exercises such as painting, journaling and many more are a few ways that can help in relieving stress and rejuvenating the body. Sometimes, all one needs to be happy is to live in the current moment.

Remember, many times people tend to give their thoughts too much power by overidentifying them. Also, times come when the world

just gets too much for an individual and they find themselves caught up in negative energy. This should not be the case as no thoughts define an individual. One must never trade their authenticity for approval. Nothing else matters. When a person learns how to separate their emotions from their reality, they become really powerful. The only certain thing is to live in the moment right now. Learning to determine which thoughts are worth time and letting go of the dysfunctional and catastrophic ones is one of the key factors to be looked for and be successful. When a person finds herself caught in a busy day or anxious moment, one must pause and think about what and whom they are grateful for.

4 Indians among 16 dead in massive Dubai building fire

PTI ■ DUBAI

Four Indians, including a couple from Kerala, were among 16 people dead after a massive fire broke out in a residential building in Dubai that also injured nine others, officials said on Sunday.

The fire broke out on the fourth floor of the building in the Al-Ras area, one of the oldest parts of Dubai, and began spreading to other areas, they said.

Sixteen people died and nine others were seriously injured, officials said.

The Indian Consulate in Dubai confirmed that four Indians were among the victims.

"The Indian victims include Rijesh Kalanganadan (38) and his wife Jeshi Kandamangalath (32). The others include Gudu Saliyakoondu (49) and Imamkasim Abdul Khader (43)," Bijender Singh, Consul, Consular and Labour, at the Indian Consulate, told PTI.

"We have received their passport copies through (Naseer) Vatanappally (an Indian social worker). We would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the families and thank the social workers and



Char marks are seen after an apartment fire in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Sunday. AP/PTI

others who have reached out with support. We are coordinating with the local authorities for the repatriation procedures," Singh added.

Quoting Naseer Vatanappally, who was at the Dubai Police mortuary, the Gulf News earlier reported that four Indians, including a couple from Kerala, have been identified among the victims.

Two men from Tamil Nadu who

worked at the building, 3 Pakistani cousins and a Nigerian woman have also been identified.

The Dubai Civil Defence Operations Room was notified about the fire at 12.35 pm on Saturday, officials said.

A team from the Dubai Civil Defence headquarters arrived at the site of the blaze and began evacuating residents in the building.

Syria's FM to revive diplomatic relations with Algeria, Tunisia

AP ■ ALGEIRS

Syria's chief diplomat has started a visit to Algeria and Tunisia as part of efforts to revive diplomatic relationships in the Arab world, more than a decade after his country was globally isolated amid President Bashar Assad's brutal crackdown on mass protests against his rule.

Foreign Minister Faisal Mikdad was welcomed on Saturday in the lounge of Algiers airport by his Algerian counterpart Ahmed Attaf. In remarks broadcast by Algerian public television, Mikdad insisted that "relations between the two brotherly countries exist and will continue to exist ... beyond the vicissitudes of the situation."

"My visit will be an opportunity for discussions between the two countries on the latest developments in the region. We need to strengthen this bilateral relationship," he added.

Algeria is one of the few Arab countries that did not cut off relations with Syria during the civil war that followed the 2011 uprising.

Mikdad notably praised Algeria's help after the devastating Feb. 6 earthquake that killed tens of thousands in Syria and neighbouring Turkey.

He was also bearing a message from Assad to his Algerian counterpart, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, the Algerian official APS news agency reported.

The visit comes after Mikdad's visit to Saudi Arabia on Wednesday that led both countries to announce they were moving toward reopening embassies and resuming flights for the first time in more than a decade.

Syria was widely shunned by Arab governments over Assad's brutal crackdown on protesters in 2011. The breakdown in relations culminated in Syria being ousted from the Arab League.

Reports: Militants kill 26 in Syrian countryside

AP ■ BEIRUT

Islamic State militants have killed 26 people who were foraging for wild truffles in Syria's Hama region, opposition and state media reported on Sunday. Amid the economic devastation of Syria's yearslong war, foraging for truffles can help people earn money, as the seasonal delicacy fetches a high price. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition media group based in Britain, said civilians and military personnel were among the victims of the armed attack in the eastern outskirts of the city of Hama, 115 miles (186 kilometers) north of the capital Damascus. State news agency SANA said that the attack was carried out by members of the Islamic State group. Despite their defeat in Syria in

March 2019, the militant group's sleeper cells still carry out deadly attacks both in Syria and Iraq where they once held territories and declared a "caliphate."

Since the truffle hunters work in large groups in remote areas, IS militants have repeatedly preyed on them, emerging from the desert to abduct them, kill some and ransom others for money. In February, IS sleeper cells attacked workers collecting truffles near the central town of Sukhna, killing at least 53 people, mostly workers but also some Syrian government security forces. Earlier this month, six people were killed by a land mine planted by the IS in the southern Deir Ez-Zor province also while foraging for truffles, according to state-run news agency SANA.

G7 vows to step up moves to renewable energy, zero carbon

AP ■ SAPPORO

Energy and environment ministers of the Group of Seven wealthy nations vowed on Sunday to work to hasten the shift toward cleaner, renewable energy, but set no timetable for phasing out coal-fired power plants as they wrapped up two days of talks in the northern Japanese city of Sapporo.

The officials issued a 36-page communique laying out their commitments ahead of a G-7 summit in Hiroshima in May.

Japan won endorsements from fellow G-7 countries for its own national strategy emphasising so-called clean coal, hydrogen and nuclear energy to help ensure its energy security.

"Recognising the current global energy crisis and economic disruptions, we reaffirm our commitment to accelerating the clean energy transition to net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 at the latest," the communique says.

The leaders reiterated the need to urgently reduce carbon emissions and achieve a "predominantly decarbonized power sector" by 2035.

"We call on and will work with other countries to end new unabated coal-fired power generation projects globally as soon as possible to accelerate the clean energy transition in a just manner," the document says.

The stipulation that countries rely on "predominantly" clean energy by 2035 leaves room for continuation of fossil-fuel fired power.

But the ministers agreed to prioritise steps toward phasing out "unabated" coal power generation — plants that do not employ mechanisms to capture emissions and prevent them from escaping into the atmosphere.

US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry said the meetings were "really constructive."

"I think the unity for the goal that was expressed of phasing out unabated fossil fuels is a very important statement," Kerry said in an interview with The Associated Press.

The call to action comes as China and other developing

Kerry: No rolling back clean energy transition

Sapporo (Japan): So much has been invested in clean energy that there can be no rolling back of moves to end carbon emissions, US climate envoy John Kerry said on Sunday.

Kerry noted that if countries deliver on promises to phase out polluting fossil fuels, the world can limit average global warming to 1.7 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), better than the worst case scenarios but still above the current limit of 1.5 C global warming above pre-industrial levels.

"We're in a very different place than where we were a year ago, let alone two and three years ago," Kerry said in an interview with The Associated Press. "But we're not doing everything we said we'd do," he said, after attending a meeting of energy and environment ministers of the Group of Seven wealthy nations.

"A lot of countries need to step up including ours to reduce emissions faster, deploy renewables faster, bring new technologies online faster all of that has to happen."

Kerry said the G-7 talks in northeastern Japan's Sapporo were "really constructive" in yielding a show of unity for phasing out use of unabated fossil fuels that emit greenhouse gases. A meeting on Thursday of President Joe Biden's Major Economies Forum, which

countries step up demands for more help in phasing out fossil fuels and stabilising energy prices and supplies amid disruptions from Russia's war on Ukraine.

The issue of setting a timeline for phasing out coal-fired power plants is a longstanding sticking point. Japan relies on coal for nearly one-third of its power generation and is also promoting the use of so-called clean coal, using technology to capture carbon emissions, to produce hydrogen — which produces only water when used as fuel. The G-7 nations account for 40 per cent of the world's eco-

nomics activity and a quarter of global carbon emissions. Their actions are critical, but so is their support for less wealthy nations often suffering the worst effects of climate change while having the fewest resources for mitigating such impacts.

Emissions in advanced economies are falling, though historically they have been higher — the United States alone accounts for about a quarter of historic global carbon emissions — while emerging markets and developing economies now account for more than two-thirds of global carbon emissions.

While there were no exchanges of fire between the North and South Korean vessels, the South Korean high-speed vessel collided with the Chinese boat as it responded to the intrusion amid poor visibility, causing bruises and other minor injuries to some of the South Korean sailors.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff said the

South Korean military is closely monitoring North Korean military activities while preparing for various possibilities of provocations.

South Korea's navy has often fired warning shots to repel North Korean vessels crossing the countries' poorly marked sea border, but there also have been some deadly clashes over the years.

South Korea blamed North Korea for an attack on a South Korean warship that killed 46 sailors in 2010, but the North has denied responsibility.

Saturday's intrusion came amid heightened tensions in the region as the pace of both North Korea's weapons demonstrations and the US-South Korean joint military exercises aimed at countering the North Korean threat have intensified in a cycle of tit-for-tat.

The South Korean and US militaries will conduct another large-scale joint exercise from next week involving some 110 warplanes,

Flights out of Taipei delayed after China launches satellite

Taipei (AP): Flights out of northern Taiwan were delayed Sunday after China launched a rocket carrying a satellite that dropped debris into waters north of the capital Taipei.

While the satellite launch had no obvious military purpose, it comes after China held large-scale military drills in response to Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's transit visit to the United States earlier this month, during which she met U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California.

Tensions remain high and China sent warplanes flying toward Taiwan more than 200 times last weekend, while its navy ships circled the self-ruled island it claims as Chinese territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry issued a statement on public media, saying it had monitored the 9:36 a.m. launch from the Jiuquan base in northwestern China.

While some rocket parts



had landed within Taiwan's air defense identification zone, they posed no threat to "our nation's territory," the statement said.

China had declared a 27-minute halt to flights over a section of the East China Sea, considerably shorter than the no-fly period over parts of three days it had originally announced.

Taiwan said it strongly protested the notice and was able to get China to reduce the flight ban time to the brief period on Sunday morning.

Still, the flight ban caused disruptions for travellers headed to Japan from

EU leaders beat a path to Xi's door seeking help

AP ■ BRUSSELS

In the weeks since Chinese leader Xi Jinping won a third five-year term as president, setting him on course to remain in power for life, leaders and diplomats from around the world have beaten a path to his door. None more so than those from Europe.

French President Emmanuel Macron made a high-profile state visit to Beijing last week accompanied by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, just days after Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock arrived in the northeast port city of Tianjin on Thursday, following a visit by Chancellor Olaf Scholz in November. The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, would have been in China this week, too, but he tested positive for COVID-19. For the 27-nation trading bloc, the reasons to head to China are clear.

As an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Xi could play a pivotal role in helping to end the war in Ukraine. The conflict has dragged

on for over a year, driven up energy prices and inflicted more damage on economies struggling to rebound from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Europeans want Xi's help. They want him to talk to Ukraine's president as well as Russia's, but they don't see him as the key mediator. China's proposed peace plan for Ukraine is mostly a list of its previously known positions and is unacceptable, EU officials say.

The EU also fears that Xi might supply weapons to Russia. They've been particularly disturbed by Putin's plans to deploy tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus. That announcement came just days after Xi and Putin met to cement their "no-limits friendship."

Baerbock said the war is "top of my agenda." Praising Beijing for easing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, she said that "its influence vis à vis Russia will have consequences for the whole of Europe and for our relationship with China."

At the same time, the EU is deeply concerned about a military escalation in the Taiwan Strait. China launched war games just after Macron left.

South Korea repels N Korean patrol boat after sea intrusion

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea's military says it fired warning shots to repel a North Korean patrol vessel that temporarily crossed the countries' disputed western sea boundary while chasing a Chinese fishing boat.

The North Korean patrol boat crossed the so-called Northern Limit Line at around 11 am on Saturday while pursuing the Chinese boat in waters near South Korea's Baekryeong island but immediately retreated after a South Korean naval vessel fired warning shots, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said on Sunday.

While there were no exchanges of fire between the North and South Korean vessels, the South Korean high-speed vessel collided with the Chinese boat as it responded to the intrusion amid poor visibility, causing bruises and other minor injuries to some of the South Korean sailors.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff said the

South Korean military is closely monitoring North Korean military activities while preparing for various possibilities of provocations.

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Saturday's intrusion came amid heightened tensions in the region as the pace of both North Korea's weapons demonstrations and the US-South Korean joint military exercises aimed at countering the North Korean threat have intensified in a cycle of tit-for-tat.

The South Korean and US militaries will conduct another large-scale joint exercise from next week involving some 110 warplanes,

including advanced F-35 fighter jets.

Seoul's Defence Ministry said the aerial drills, which will begin Monday and continue through April 28, are aimed at sharpening combined operational abilities and demonstrating the allies' joint defence posture in the face of North Korean threats. North Korea last week staged one of its most provocative military displays in years by test-launching what it described as a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile, which if perfected could potentially give the North a more powerful and harder-to-detect weapon targeting the mainland United States.

South Korean officials also say North Korea has not been responding to South Korean calls on a set of cross-border inter-Korean hotlines for more than a week, which raises concerns about potential kinetic provocations as communications on those channels are meant to prevent accidental clashes along the rivals' sea borders.

Saudi prince gives 4% Aramco stake to public investment firm

Dubai (AP): Saudi Arabia's crown prince announced on Sunday the transfer of a 4 per cent stake of the oil giant Saudi Aramco to a subsidiary of the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund, further boosting its coffers as the kingdom tries to expand its economy beyond oil.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's decision, announced by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, sends the stake to the Saudi Arabian Investment Co., known as Sanabil Investments. Sanabil is under the sovereign wealth fund known as the Public Investment Fund.

"The transfer will also solidify PIF's strong financial position and credit rating," the statement about the deal said. It gave no possible investment targets for either Sanabil or the PIF.

Saudi Aramco, formally known as the Saudi Arabian Oil Co., acknowledged the shares going to Sanabil. It said the Saudi government remains the oil firm's biggest shareholder, with over 90 per cent of its stock.

"This is a private transfer between the state and Sanabil, and the company is not a party to the transfer and did not enter into any agreements or pay or receive any proceeds from the transfer," Aramco said in a stock market filing.

Anti-govt protest in Prague

Prague (AP): Thousands of people rallied again in the Czech capital on Sunday to protest high inflation and demand the government's resignation.

It was the second such rally at Prague's Wenceslas Square after one on March 11 that was organised by a new political party known as PRO under an "against the poverty" banner.

The demonstrators, speakers at the protest and the head of the populist group, Jindrich Rajchl, blamed the European Union and the Czech government for soaring inflation and all repeatedly called on the current five-party coalition to resign.

"We want the government's resignation," Rajchl told the crowd. Rajchl, a lawyer by profession, is the former deputy head of the Czech soccer association.

"Resign, resign," the protesters chanted.

"We're here to stand by our



country," Rajchl said.

His group, whose name in English stands for Law, Respect, Expertise has no seats in parliament. Rajchl claimed his group was ready to further escalate the protests.

Inflation has been high but on the decline in recent months, dropping to 15 per cent in March, down from 16.7 per cent in February and 17.5 per cent the month before.

The protesters also want the Czech government to stop taking actions that are intended to

reduce misinformation and fake news.

Although Rajchl rejected his group is pro-Russia, the protesters condemned the government's stance in Russia's war against Ukraine.

The Czech Republic has staunchly supported the government in Kyiv since Russian troops invaded Ukraine. The country has provided weapons for the Ukrainian military and taken in about 500,000 refugees.

Rajchl called Defence Minister Jana Chocova, a vocal supporter of the pro-Ukraine stance, "the biggest security risk for our country."

Some people at the rally were signing a petition demanding the country quits NATO.

Protesters were planning to march to the government office later on Sunday. Prime Minister Petr Fiala is currently on a trip to Asia.

Many POWs freed as Ukraine marks Orthodox Easter

Kyiv (AP): More than 100 Ukrainian prisoners of war have been released as part of a major Easter exchange with Russia, a top official said Sunday, as Orthodox Ukrainians marked the holiday for a second time since Moscow unleashed its brutal full-scale war last February.

While celebrations were subdued due to security risks, with a curfew barring the faithful from customary all-night services, Ukrainian authorities and ordinary people shared messages of hope, linking the story of Jesus' resurrection to their longing for peace and a Ukrainian victory.

Dozens of families had special reasons to rejoice, as presidential adviser Andriy Yermak announced that 130 soldiers, sailors, border guards and others captured by Moscow were on their way back home following a "big Easter prisoner exchange."

Yermak said in a Telegram post Sunday that those released included troops who fought near Bakhmut, the eastern mining city which has for months been the focus of Russia's grinding offensive.

"The lives of our people are the highest value for us," Yermak said, adding that Kyiv's goal was to bring back all remaining POWs.

There was no immediate information on how many Russian prisoners were released, but the press service of the founder of the Wagner Group, the Kremlin-affiliated paramilitary force whose fighters are prominent in eastern Ukraine, also released a video Sunday showing Ukrainian prisoners of war being readied for an exchange.

The video, published on the Telegram messaging service, features Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin instructing a soldier to prepare the Ukrainian captives to leave Russian-controlled territory "by lunchtime" on Sunday. The POWs are then shown boarding trucks and walking along a road.

In his Easter address released on Sunday morning, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the holiday as marking "the victory of good, the victory of truth, the victory of life," and he stressed what he said was Ukrainian unity in the face of Russian aggression.



A woman and child hold candles during the Orthodox Easter religious service at the Patriarchal Cathedral in Bucharest, Romania, early on Sunday. AP/PTI

Arsenal blow lead in West Ham draw

AP ■ LONDON

Arsenal blew a two-goal lead for the second game in a row as Bukayo Saka's penalty miss proved crucial in the Premier League leaders' damaging 2-2 draw against West Ham on Sunday. Mikel Arteta's side struck twice in the first 10 minutes at the London Stadium thanks to goals from Gabriel Jesus and Martin Odegaard.

But just seven days after squandering a 2-0 advantage in their 2-2 draw at Liverpool, the Gunners again cracked under the pressure of the title race.

Said Benrahma's penalty reduced the deficit for West Ham before the interval and after Saka fired his spot-kick wide early in the second half, Jarrod Bowen volleyed in an equaliser for the struggling hosts. It was a hammer blow for Arsenal, who sit four points clear of second-placed Manchester City but have ceded the title race momentum to Pep Guardiola's team.

City had closed within three points of the Gunners after beating Leicester 3-1 on Saturday and it is the champions who have the destiny of the title in their hands despite trailing Arsenal for much of the season.

City, who have won their last 10 matches in all competitions, have a game in hand on Arsenal.

With a home game against Arsenal looming on April 26, City know they will lift a fifth title in six seasons if they win their remaining eight matches.

By the time Arsenal travel to the Emirates Stadium they will be seven points clear of City if they beat bottom-of-the-table Southampton on Friday.

Yet that gap would still look uncomfortably small to Arsenal fans fearing their team are in the process of wasting a golden opportunity to win a first title since 2004.

While City are battle-tested in handling the tension of the title race, Arsenal's young squad look to be suffering an ill-timed attack of nerves.



deft pass found Ben White, who delivered a low cross that Jesus slotted home at the far post.

Jesus's fourth goal in his last three games was followed by the Gunners' second three minutes later as they ruthlessly punished West Ham's woeful marking.

Gabriel Martinelli's pin-point cross found Odegaard in acres of space and the midfielder blasted a volley past Lukas Fabianski from an acute angle six yards out.

The turning point came in the 33rd minute when Arsenal, looking a little over-confident after such a swaggering start, needlessly conceded a penalty.

Thomas Partey surrendered possession to Declan Rice and when the West Ham midfielder picked out Lucas Paqueta's run, Gabriel Magalhaes' mistimed sliding tackle was correctly ruled a penalty despite Arsenal appeals for handball.

Mohamed Salah had missed a penalty against Arsenal last weekend, but they were out of luck this time as Benrahma sent Aaron Ramsdale the wrong way from the spot.

Michail Antonio's header was tipped over by Ramsdale moments later as Arsenal started to creep.

Saka should have eased Arsenal's mounting anxiety when Antonio conceded a 50th minute penalty with an outstretched arm that blocked Martinelli's flick.

But instead Saka spiked the tension level even higher with a woeful spot-kick that completely missed hit the target, a costly blunder that recalled the England forward's Euro 2020 final penalty shootout failure against Italy.

Saka held his head in his hands and with Arsenal clearly rattled, David Moyes' side snatched an equaliser in the 54th minute.

Thilo Kehrer guided the ball into the Arsenal area and Bowen was just inside as his volley ricocheted off the turf and skidded past Ramsdale's despairing dive.

Antonio nearly won it for West Ham in the closing stages, rising to head Benrahma's cross against the bar.



Napoli and Inter stall ahead of CL deciders

AP ■ MILAN

Napoli dropped points ahead of the Champions League showdown against AC Milan following draw with Verona on Saturday, while Inter Milan were beaten 1-0 by Monza with Benfica looming.

Italy's champions-elect Napoli have had their imposing league lead cut to 14 points after a second-string XI could only manage a goalless stalemate with Verona and second-placed Lazio won at Spezia on Friday.

As it stands Luciano Spalletti's side still need 11 points from their final eight matches to seal their first league title since 1990, but all eyes are now on Tuesday's second leg of their quarter-final clash with Milan in Naples in which they have to overturn a 1-0 deficit.

Not even the second-half introduction of returning star striker Victor Osimhen -- who smashed a volley off the bar in the 82nd minute -- and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia could force a breakthrough at a loud Stadio Maradona.

Spalletti said that Serie A's top scorer Osimhen will start on Tuesday, adding: "He is a hero for these fans, there is always so much enthusiasm around him".

The draw was a fine result for struggling Verona which puts them three points behind Spezia, who sit just outside the drop zone.

Inter would have moved above both Milan and Roma had they beaten Monza but Luca Caldirola's 78th minute header condemned Simone Inzaghi's side to their 11th defeat of an immensely disappointing league season.

They are two points away from Italy's Champions League places, and risk not qualifying for the competition in which they should reach the last four on Wednesday.

Inter host Benfica hot favourites to be in an all-Italian semi-final thanks to their impressive 2-0 win in Lisbon last week, but have lost their last three home matches without scoring a single goal.

Real waltz past Cadiz

AP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid were made to wait, but eventually conjured a stylish 2-0 victory at Cadiz on Saturday in La Liga, ahead of their Champions League trip to face Chelsea.

Nacho Fernandez and Marco Asensio struck to help champions Madrid cut Barcelona's lead at the top of the table to 10 points, before the Catalans visit Getafe on Sunday.

Both sides hit the woodwork in the first half but Madrid overran their opponents, with only Cadiz goalkeeper David Gil keeping them at bay.

Eventually, when it seemed they had tried everything, Nacho broke the deadlock in the 72nd minute with a drive from distance, with Asensio adding another four minutes later.

"Good attitude, good commitment, good combinations, the team played very well," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"It was a game that could have been a trap -- the players were concentrating well, and we played well."

Ancelotti rang the changes at the Nuevo Mirandilla to rest players for the visit to Stamford Bridge for the quarter-final second leg, including veteran mid-



fielders Toni Kroos and Luka Modric and winger Vinicius Junior.

Madrid suffered a 3-2 home defeat by Villarreal last weekend before the 2-0 first leg win over

the shots and, finally, their 26th effort of the night went in.

It came from an unlikely source, in veteran defender Nacho, who drove home from the edge of the box into the bottom corner.

With Cadiz's resistance broken, Madrid quickly added another. Fede Valverde carried the ball forward and fed Asensio, who finished clinically.

It was a satisfying evening for Ancelotti and his team, leaving them in good shape to continue their European adventure, aiming to finish the job in London and reach the semi-finals. Defeat leaves Cadiz 15th, four points clear of the drop zone.

Elsewhere Inaki Williams scored twice as Athletic Bilbao beat Real Sociedad 2-0 in the Basque derby, giving a fiery San Mames something to celebrate after the team's Copa del Rey semi-final exit.

La Real had the chance to tighten their grip on fourth place after Villarreal, sixth, stumbled to a 2-1 home defeat by relegation-battling Real Valladolid, but fell short in Bilbao.

Real Betis beat struggling Espanyol 3-1 to move fifth, three points behind Imanol Alguacil's side.



PSG beat title rivals Lens

AP ■ PARIS

A brilliant Lionel Messi goal helped Paris Saint-Germain to a 3-1 home win over Lens on Saturday to surely end any doubt about the outcome of this season's Ligue 1 title race, after an early sending-off left the visitors with a mountain to climb.

Lens, who began the day six points behind league leaders PSG in second place, looked the better team until Ghana midfielder Salis Abdul Samed was dismissed for a dangerous challenge on Achraf Hakimi in the 19th minute.

That changed everything, and by half-time the hosts were out of sight thanks to three goals in the space of 10 minutes from Kylian Mbappe, Vitinha and then Messi, with Przemyslaw Frankowski pulling one back for Lens from a penalty.

Mbappe opened the scoring and Vitinha's long-ranger doubled PSG's lead in the 37th minute. Both goals were good but Messi's that made it 3-0 was stunning, the Argentine finding a pocket out of space outside the area, feeding a pass to Mbappe and then receiving the France striker's backheel return before slotting beyond goalkeeper Brice Samba and into the far corner.

The result leaves the reigning champions nine points ahead with seven games left, meaning it is surely just a matter of time until PSG secure a French record 11th league title.

"We must not think that it's done and dusted," said coach Christophe Galtier.

"We will need to remain serious and determined to maintain our lead and not give any hope to the teams chasing us."

The win comes at the end of a week overshadowed by allegations of racism against Galtier, who had already been under pressure since PSG's elimination from the Champions League last month.



Rublev wins first Masters title in Monte Carlo

AP ■ MONTE CARLO

Russia's Andrey Rublev fought back against Denmark's Holger Rune to win his first Masters 1000 title in Monte Carlo on Sunday.

The fifth seed rallied from 4-1 down in the deciding set to defeat sixth-seeded teenager Rune 5-7, 6-2, 7-5 after one hour 34 minutes on the red clay of Court Rainier III.

Rublev, 25, claimed the biggest win of his career after losing Masters finals in Monte Carlo and Cincinnati, both in 2021.

"I don't know what to say. Trailing 1-4, 0/30, then saving

break points, thinking there is no chance to win. But somehow I did it," said the world number six, who blasted down 33 winners on the way to the 13th title of his career.

"I was hoping deep inside that I would have one chance," he continued.

"Play until the end. I remember the previous finals and when I was losing I thought I'd have no chance and mentally I was going down."

"But today I thought, 'Just believe until the end', and this is what I was trying to do in the third set, hoping I would have an extra chance to come back and what a way to do it."

USA sweep into BJK Cup Finals with France, Czech

AP ■ PARIS

Jessica Pegula sealed victory for the United States over Austria on Saturday as the record 18-time champions secured their place in the Billie Jean King Cup Finals.

World number three Pegula made quick work of Julia Grabher, winning 6-1, 6-3, to give the heavily favoured Americans an unassailable 3-0 lead over Austria in their tie in Delray Beach, Florida.

"I really wanted to clinch today," said Pegula. "It's so much more exciting when you get to guarantee your team through."

It was a second singles victory in 24 hours for Pegula after she followed up Coco Gauff's opening win over Grabher on Friday by defeating Sinja Kraus in straight sets.

Gauff skipped the singles game against Kraus but secured a 4-0 win for the Americans with a doubles victory alongside Caty McNally against Melanie Klaffner and Kraus.

Canada defeated Belgium 3-2 with Leylah Fernandez and Gabriela Dabrowski winning the deciding doubles game with a 6-1, 6-2 victory over Kirsten

Flipkens and Greet Minnen.

In Saturday's singles games, Minnen beat Katherine Sebov 6-2, 3-6, 6-3, and Fernandez fought back for a 4-6, 7-5, 6-2 win over Ysaline Bonaventure.

The Czech Republic saw off Ukraine 3-1, with Marketa Vondrousova earning the winning point against Katarina Zavatska 6-3, 6-4, after former French Open champion Barbora Krejickova lost 3-6, 6-1, 6-4 to 38th-ranked Marta Kostyuk.

On Friday, 12th-ranked Krejickova eased past Zavatska after 2019 Roland Garros runner-up Vondrousova dispatched Kostyuk.

The matches were played in the Turkish city of Antalya because of the war in Ukraine.

World number five Caroline Garcia sent France through with a 6-1, 6-7 (10/12), 6-1 win over Britain's Harriet Dart in Coventry.

Britain, which reached the semi-finals last year, were missing Emma Raducanu, leaving 138th-ranked Dart as their top singles player.

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On Friday, Garcia and Alize Cornet had to play almost six hours between them to edge out Katie Boulter 6-7 (2/7), 7-6



(7/4), 7-6 (7/2) and Dart 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/3) respectively.

Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina beat Poland's Magda Linette to wrap up victory for Kazakhstan.

Rybakina won 6-4, 6-2 in the third rubber in Astana having also won Friday against Weronika Falkowska when

196th-ranked Marcela Zacarias 6-3, 6-0.

In Stuttgart, Germany's Anna-Lena Friedsam made up for losing the hosts' opening rubber by clinching the winning point with a 6-1, 6-0 thrashing of Brazil's Laura Pigossi.

Jule Niemeier earlier defeated Haddad Maia 7-6 (7/3), 3-6, 6-2. Italy got the better of Slovakia 3-2 as Martina Trevisan and Elisabetta Cocciaretto beat Viktorija Hrucakova and Tereza Mihalikova 6-4, 4-6, 7-5 in the deciding doubles.

On Sunday, Slovenia earned their berth with doubles duo Kaja Juvan and Tamara Zidansek sealing a 3-2 win over Romania in the rain-interrupted decisive rubber.

Defending champions Switzerland and 2022 runners-up Australia received automatic qualification to the November 7-12 finals, which will feature four groups of three.

The nine qualifying nations are Slovenia, France, the United States, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Spain and Canada.

A 12th and final team, yet to be determined, will receive an invitation.

